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The Pacific Journal of Theology

Journal of the South Pacific Association of Theological Schools (SPATS)

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The South Pacific Association of Theological Schools is deeply grateful to:

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Editorial

Greetings to you all readers in God's grace. After being asked to comment on this issue, I think that it will be appropriate for me to say *bula* and hello to you all. I am happy to be part of SPATS and it is a great privilege to take up the post of General Secretary as from February, 2009. My family and I are looking forward to continue the good work of my predecessor and we wish all the best for your constant inputs in future. *Vinaka.*

The failure in community building in our world today is the failure of our churches in empowering its people to be liberating communities. This is one of the findings on the recent General Assembly of the Pacific Conference of Churches (PCC) held in Samoa¹ that is also the focus of this publication.

It is obvious that most of the sufferings of the people in the region are the end results of how our churches are participating in communities. Inevitable, our Oceania has been shaped by various social worlds which have dictated our behavioural life pattern and most of all have motivated our responses to particular issues. the ongoing global economic recession and the rising of



Rusiate Tuidrakulu

Rev. Rusiate Tuidrakulu is the newly appointed General Secretary of the South Pacific Association of Theological Schools (SPATS) and is an ordained minister of the Methodist Church in Fiji.

militarism and its inhuman actions have greatly challenged the meeting of community, raising questions of its nature today.

Indeed, Oceania region is not only on the receiving end of the global agendas but are also more becoming a place for balancing the needs, desires, and demands of various groups. Most of us in the south see our society this way and in the end reinforce the fantasies 'individualism. likewise, the encroachment of post-liberalism is no surprise that the more freedom we arrive at the more we suffer from such social disorders and behaviours including emptiness and isolation. The issues of violence, *cou de'tats*, destruction of nature and the continuing existence of neo-colonialism are only some imprints already at hand in our region.

Like any other social group, community life is important and *ecumene* confesses the very heart of Christian faith. Unfortunately, some are opting for individualistic living in the name of democracy and freedom that suits their own agendas. Most communities are caught in such ideology rather than responding to the needs of others. Moreover, as we are still recovering from the colonial pangs, we continue to lose grip of our faith community and instead crown individualism in the name of democracy, equality and freedom of all. This is a great challenge for our churches and theological academics to explore more.

This is what the issue is all about and we are fortunate that our contributors approach this dilemma between community faith and action with a sense of openness as they draw us to its complexities. We begin with Ulrich Duchrow introducing the issue on the global level. Duchrow draws our attention in this age of globalization where capitalism is a commodity and our world is dominated by violence interlinked with possession. A scholar and a grassroot church worker, Duchrow is convinced that there is a new ecumenical vision for community life which is already growing globally. Using Europe as the model, Duchrow claims that social movements are already countering the imperial capitalism of the world's superpowers and shedding rays of hope. therefore the churches must side with the



people and its social and ecumenical movements and not of the powerful.

On the same vein, Mikaele Paunga generates discussion by bringing us closer to home, calling on church leaders to engage more and maintain a prophetic voice. Paunga insists that community should be liberated from the new global culture and global ethic though there are dangers in its Christian mission. With the issue of our 'smallness' (Oceania region) in his mind, Paunga encourages the Oceania Community to counter the ungodly human threat of the world powers starting first with the PCC.

The issue rounds off with Bible wisdoms from two areas with Fr. John Cabrido's presentation on the narrative function of Shepherd in Matthew's gospel and a series of bible study articles by Rosalyn Nokise, Mereia Votomosi and Sunia G. Tala'ase. While the former offers an in-depth exposition on the notion of 'shepherd' the latter group offers an interesting perspective from Pacific women in search of a fresh understanding of liberating community from the Bible.

Nokise begins by asking God's empowerment because life is under threat within the region and each individual is to be a liberator calling for more action than what we are doing now. The article ends with the encouragement to the liberating communities as midwives valuing each and everyone. Votomosi's in-depth study on Pauline's Christology offers a fresh view to discover our worth that is only measured in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. The appeal by Tala'ase shows the elements of suffering and oppression in the community that theological educators and church leaders need to address.

All in all, this issue is all about our lives and what is our ecumenical vision for our community tomorrow. It may help us to rediscover our ecumenical and social engagements in its forms of social relatedness and create a sense of truth of who we are. If we accept this as a fact of our existence in Oceania, our church leaders, theological educators and mission workers must recognize the urgent

call to the work of liberating our communities through shared spirituality of ecumenism here and now.

We apologise for the late publication of this issue. As this is my first issue in the editorial board, I wish to convey my gratitude to the outgoing General Secretary of SPATS, the Rev. Tevita Nawadra Banivanua, for his many inputs in sharing his wisdom, knowledge and experience in the work of the journal. I look forward to work with the editorial board and with you, readers.

Notes

¹ See presentation papers of the General Assembly of PCC, 2007 held in Samoa with the theme "Atua, empower us to be Liberating Communities through a shared Spirituality of Ecumenism in the Pacific".

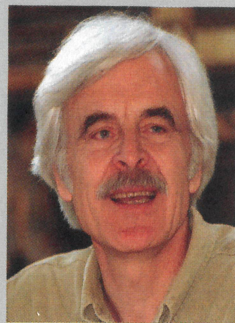


Faith Communities and Empire

People and the earth are suffering from the dominating economic, political and ideological system at a global scale. This is why the ecumenical movement and the social movements worldwide are looking for alternatives. Before identifying a new vision in global context from a European perspective it is, however, essential to analyse the status quo concerning the European Union (EU) and the European churches with regard to the global empire, spearheaded by the USA.

I. The European imperial paradigm in history and today and the churches in Europe

Thesis 1: Europe has been built on the paradigm of the Roman Empire for more than 1000 years. The classical period of European imperialism at the end of the nineteenth century was developed in order to support foreign investments of European capital in profitable regions of the world through hegemonic political and military means. Now that the US has taken over this model and role, the present policy of the European Union (EU) is trying to establish Europe as a sub-empire, partly in competition,



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partly in alliance with the US. European majority churches have historically supported this model. While an ecumenical learning process in the twentieth century led to new insights, at present the majority of churches are unwilling to face the reality of the EU in the context of global empire.

The paradigm of the *Roman Empire* is built on the model of the *Hellenistic Empires* starting with Alexander the Great (after 333 B.C.). Both are built on the basic model of patriarchy as part of a property-money-economy, i.e. of the absolute power of the male property owner. The “house father” (Greek “despotes”, Latin “dominus”) was the absolute owner of land, animals, slaves, women and children.¹ Originally these patriarchs formed a polis and a republic, but later developed into a pyramid system with the despotic emperor at the top. The linkage of economic, political, military, social and ideological (including religious) absolute power included the split between cities and rural areas because the owners gathered in the cities, having administrators operating their properties in the countryside with slave labor.

In the *Middle Ages* the popes in Rome, striving for an imperial structure of the church, understood themselves as the responsible agents for passing on the Roman Empire to the Europeans (*translatio imperii*), first to the Franks, then to the Germans (*Holy Roman Empire of German Nation*)², which finally was governed by the Habsburg emperors, who first globalized the empire by conquering Latin America after 1492.³

Since the 14th century the capitalist dynamics complemented and reinforced this imperial development of Europe. This dynamics again was coupled with European science and technology on the basis of the Cartesian understanding of rational man being “the master and owner of nature”. Built on the absolute private property and rationality of men in the sense of Roman law and Greek philosophy, *capital accumulation* became the driving force of the European systems. John Locke was the first to conceptualise this paradigm (1690).⁴ He established the priority of the property accumulation in the global market by rational and industrious men. The state was defined as



having the only purpose of protecting (the unequally distributed) property.

As the nation states prevailed over the one empire, they developed colonies all over the world in competition with each other. Eventually this led to the classical *imperialist period* at the end of the 19th century.⁵ When European capital ran into an overproduction crisis, decreasing the profits, it started to invest in profitable regions like e.g. South Africa (gold and diamonds) and called upon their governments to protect their foreign investments and profits. This gave rise to growing expansion in competition which, combined with speculative capital accumulation, eventually led up to the catastrophe of classical liberal capitalism in both the Great Recession (1929) and the two world wars.

After World War II the USA took over as hegemonic power of the capitalist world system, since the 1980ies under neoliberal auspices, as is well known. The think tanks of the Bush jr. administration openly define the USA as the heir of the Roman Empire establishing a Pax Americana.⁶ But the European Community (EC) also began to form itself as “A Superpower in the Making” – as Johan Galtung called it in his book with this title, published in 1973.⁷ He observed that the original EC consisted of the formerly six colonial European powers - however, now led by the power of the TNCs. This European project developed over the years until the European Union (EU) wanted to forge this concept into a *European Constitution*. This was designed to make neoliberalism and militarization for imperial purposes the basic law of the EU destroying the national constitutions of the period after World War II which in the case of e.g. Germany was designed to guarantee the social obligation of private property, the social welfare state and the peace orientation by limiting the military to self-defence and prohibiting wars of aggression.⁸ Fortunately the French and Dutch citizens rejected the European Constitution, but the policies of neoliberal economy and finance as well as the military build-up of the EU for worldwide intervention is continuing even without a constitutional basis. Another case in point is the European

Monetary Union. Not only was it not linked to a common social policy but also it missed the chance of pressing for a new international regulation of the monetary system. Now the euro is competing with the dollar in a deregulated market system with speculative risks. Also the move of oil countries like Iraq under Saddam Hussein from the dollar to the euro as trading and reserve currency is one further stimulus for imperial wars. Summarizing, it can be said that the EU is part of the neoliberal capitalist US Empire, partly competing with the USA within this framework.

It is in this context we must evaluate the refusal of the majority of *European churches* to deal with the issue of empire as could be seen at the WARC General Council meeting in Accra (2004) and thereafter. Their only concern was the question of whether the name of God should be mentioned in the European Constitution and some generalities concerning its social character. These had been put into the form of a Charter of Fundamental Human Rights (Part II of the Constitution). What the churches overlooked was the fact that these rights were guaranteed only in the framework of the hard-core political and economic provisions in Part III of the Constitution. This they should have realised by understanding the fundamental contradictions between imperial capitalism and human rights, based on the fact that capitalism historically and systematically tends to limit the rights to male property owners and people with the power to engage in contracts.⁹

What may be the reasons for the position of the European churches? My hunch is the following: Up to recently the Europeans could leave the dirty jobs of protecting Western exploitation of the world's resources to the USA, which up to recently even disguised their imperial acts by utilising proxies. In the shadow of the superpower Europeans could do profitable business. Now the USA under the Bush jr. administration is taking off the mask and acting openly and brutally themselves as imperialist power. And also the EU itself is beginning to openly form itself as an imperial power. This is shaking the illusion of the West being a social and democratic market society,



which up to now has been the basis for the positive relationship between the churches and the political and economic system and elites. Realising this reality would bring the churches into a basic conflict with the powers of the existing system, which they fear because of the privileges they still enjoy in the old pattern of Constantinian church-state relationships. The CEC position paper in the AGAPE process, “European churches living their faith in the context of globalisation”, clearly shows that they keep up the illusion that the EU in reality is still operating within the framework of the “Social Market Economy” and that the European churches should make their contribution to the AGAPE process by giving ethical advice to the powerful in “dialogues” in order to motivate them to regulate the global economy according to this “European model”. There is no recognition of the fact that day by day the social welfare state is being dismantled in Europe itself – not to mention the neoliberal policies towards the South – and that imperial militarization is advancing step by step.

This illusionary consciousness is characteristic of the middle-class mentality, as recent research has shown.¹⁰ The middle classes are upwardly oriented by definition, but they also, when put under threat, revitalise an early childhood mechanism by which the infant idealises the powerful parent while splitting off the evil part of the powerful “other” and taking it into its own inner self. Consequently, when an adult experiences threats from above, he or she takes this evil into himself or herself which either leads to depressions or to diverting the aggression onto a scapegoat below. So e.g. the cause of unemployment is seen as the result of the influx of migrant workers who are accused of taking away their jobs. In this way, middle-classes and middle-class churches can regard the economic and political elites as the well-meaning, responsible actors to be addressed by ethical demands in dialogue with the assumption that they will positively change the situation – instead of seeing them as the cause of the evil and joining the struggling victims.

What, under these circumstances, could there be a new ecumenical vision from a European perspective?

II. A new paradigm: Living organisms

Thesis II: While the imperial capitalist model is a dis-embedded and mechanistic machine designed to accumulate wealth and power, the new paradigm is a living organism in relationships. This paradigm corresponds with the understanding of human beings as responsible persons in community rather than as atomistic individuals driven by the fetishism of commodities, money, and capital. This is in line with the biblical understanding that human beings are created in the image of God as male and female. The relationship between men and women as equals is the core and root of a community in mutuality. Jesus contrasts being in service to each other with the hierarchical power system of the Hellenistic-Roman empires. A recent example of this approach is Gandhi's challenge to the Western understanding of politics and economics.

Before going into the details of a new strategy we need to ask whether there is a basically new paradigm available, overcoming the capitalist imperial model of Hellenistic-Roman and European origin. David Korten has convincingly drawn ancient visions and practices into today's scholarly theory-building¹¹ which could be even strengthened by indigenous wisdom and the African Ubuntu culture of today. Korten's central thesis is: the capitalist economy, which has been "dis-embedded" from all social and ecological relations (Karl Polanyi¹²), is following the paradigm of Cartesian and Newtonian mechanics. According to them, the economy functions as a money-multiplying machine for property owners. An economy which takes into consideration relational life, must on the contrary, work in accordance with the *paradigm of living organisms in relationships*. In this paradigm it becomes clear that the single cell, which continues to grow egoistically, with no regard for the entire organism, is a cancer cell. It grows and multiplies until it has killed the host organism – and then dies itself. Here, murder is precisely suicide – exactly that which absolute imperial capitalism does with all societies, and ultimately with the earth, if it is not stopped. In contrast to this model, the single cells of a living organism in relationships function so that they make decisions in great variety and in interaction with their environment: that way the



entire organism – and they themselves – have the greatest chances for survival. With this paradigm, a healthy economy is built, based on local, regional, varied, interdependent community units, which then join together in networks with larger units – just as in life itself.

There has to be a certain caution here in order not to fall into the trap of a naturalistic misunderstanding of this paradigm. Humans are not just organisms, but are called to be responsible subjects in community. The present system of commodities, money and capital is characterized by fetishism which enslaves the people and governs them from the back by pushing them into the competition of the market for a brutal survival struggle of atomized individuals, instead of empowering responsible subjects to work for life and the common good. So the key task for an alternative vision is to liberate people towards a relational, *cooperative self-understanding of the creatively and responsibly acting subjects, in other words towards being a person-in-community*¹³. That this is possible is being confirmed by recent brain research. Human beings do have a physiological base for empathy in what is called “mirror neurons”. These neurons enable people to spontaneously feel what others feel. When I see a person in pain I myself feel the pain physically. Also relational psychology shows how the subject is born and strengthened by the original interrelationship of inter-subjectivity with the parents and other persons, built on mutual recognition. Under present imperial capitalism the original potential of subjectivity breaks through in the “cry of the subject” rebelling against oppression and exploitation.¹⁴ Cooperative, transformative communities for life can be formed and organized on this basis.

According to biblical theology, since the time of the prophet Ezekiel human beings have been seen as being created in the image of God, as women and men, i.e. relational (Gen 1: 26-28). So it is in the overcoming of property-based patriarchy that the liberation of the subject and the society finds its most basic expression. This is reflected in Jesus’ conflict with his male disciples as recorded in Mark 10:42ff.:¹⁵

“You know that in the world the recognized rulers lord it over their subjects, and their great men make them feel the weight of authority. That is not the way with you, whoever wants to be great must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be the willing slave of all.”

On the one hand, this saying of Jesus summarizes a whole political; economic and cultural analysis. Rome and its accomplices in the upper class in Palestine’s centre and periphery represent nothing but oppression and violent exploitation. Saying this clearly is in itself liberating. It creates distance. It deprives the system of any legitimacy. It de-ideologizes it. The whole Pax Romana is just oppression and exploitation. There is nothing there to build on and nothing there worth taming. So it is very important to realize that the issue of empire is not limited to an imperial political and economic system. Rather it concerns the imperial spirit and structures throughout all relationships at all levels of society and culture starting from the patriarchal family. Jesus rejected domination and empire at all these levels.¹⁶

On the other hand, he enabled his followers to start creating alternatives by mutual service. L. Schottroff has shown that *diakonein*, to the extent that it has to do with service, means the kinds of caring which, under the patriarchal distribution of roles, are done only by slaves and women, never by free men.¹⁷ But here “serving” – far from meaning organized charitable work in a social system otherwise defined by exploitation and authority – is understood as typifying a counter-culture in which exploitation and oppressive authority are put aside. In the house all are like brothers and sisters. That links up with the family solidarity of the pre-state and post-exile egalitarian society of peasant families in Ancient Israel, but it goes beyond that. Even the patriarchal structure of the house itself is to be transformed, although this is only consistent with Israel’s egalitarian tendency. “Here equality in principle is assumed, and its vitality is in mutual service. The disciples of Jesus build a counter-model to the world’s authority structure.”¹⁸



L. Schottroff points out that Jesus' central idea, loving one's neighbor, meant this kind of family solidarity as early as in Deuteronomy and the Holiness Code. That implies that, with Jesus, love in the socio-economic sense means precisely acting like brothers and sisters, through which there occurs in the house and between houses a completely equal form of cooperation in mutual service. The term "slave of all" signifies that brother-and-sisterliness, mutuality and solidarity do not stop at the borders of the patriarchal house. "For even the human one did not come to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many" (Mk 10:45). These reflections also show that it is not enough to point to the house (oikos) as the alternative. We have to distinguish between the households of solidarity and the house of the patriarchal Greek-Roman type of oikos. Economically speaking, the early church, according to Acts 4,32ff., followed this model of mutual service by abolishing the absoluteness of property and instead sharing what they had so that there was no needy among them.

Politically it was *Gandhi* who applied this model in creating a new concept and practice of politics.¹⁹ It can be best understood by contrasting it with the Roman-European tradition. Here the key definition of the "political" is *potestas*, power with the ultimate characteristic of force and violence, the "sword" being the symbol. Already the *Apostle Paul* interpreted it as being legitimate because God is using the power for the good of the people by punishing the evildoers – of course, not justifying the absolute power of the emperor and empire but in the limited form of local authorities. *Luther* took this up in his context by interpreting political power, even using violence, as justified in the service of others as alien form of love. He limited the Sermon on the Mount to matters pertaining to ones' own interest. However, he saw the problem of leaving room to injustice by not fighting back. Consequently he called it a main task of the ordained minister to publicly protest against injustice. Also while rejecting "fighting for ones' right" he challenged people suffering from injustice to "confess their right", both actions pre-shadowing non-violent direct action against injustice. However,

European history since has shown that this concept of political power, even though limited by the constitutional division of this power, has more and more taken the form of an autonomous sphere detached from the people. This tendency has been increased by the definition of the liberal state as protector of property and contract.

Gandhi analyses sharply this interconnectedness of Western property order and the violent character of the state by saying: "Where there is possessiveness, there is violence".²⁰ So he rejects property beyond need (i.e. property in its use value versus property in its exchange value, invested in the competitive market for the single objective of capital accumulation). This property for accumulation is necessarily linked with direct political, structural economic and cultural violence. Defining politics as service of others while using force leads to putting the order in the centre without regard for the acting people. The protected is deprived of his or her own activity and the "protector" is deprived of communication and in that sense also of being a responsible subject. So for Gandhi the form of political action in the sense of struggling against injustice is *satyagraha*, which is drawn from the Sanskrit *Satya*/truth and *agraha*/standing steadfastly, meaning "sticking to truth". In this way religion as loyalty to truth is necessarily connected with politics. "Politics separated from religion stinks, religion detached from politics is meaningless. Politics means any activity for the welfare of the people".²¹ In his situation of fighting the British colonial power it means non-violent resistance. But it can also mean constructive work with the people. The key is that the people are participatory subjects and that even the politicians serving an unjust system are given the chance to give in to truth when challenged by the people confronting them through non-violent action. Thus politics is not defined as order implemented through force and violence but by rights for people's capacity to satisfy their basic needs and to participate in the constant political struggle for as much truth as possible.

This means that we can fundamentally challenge the Roman-European-western approach to economy and politics at all levels, not only on the basis of the biblical heritage but also building on theory and practice



of Gandhi. This means we have an inter-cultural and inter-religious option for alternatives in a nutshell, not only for economics but also for politics. A similar model is being promoted by the Zapatistas in Chiapas, Mexico. They stress that the goal is not to seize power within the existing system but rather to change the character of power relationships during the struggle. Therefore, they walk slowly on the way towards the alternative, always questioning themselves.

III. A compound strategy for building communities of life in mutuality against the competitive capitalist empire

Thesis III: The new paradigm can be implemented in a compound strategy. This strategy consists of withdrawing energy from the dominating lethal system and of nurturing life. This means de-legitimizing the myths of imperial neo-liberalism as well as concretely resisting and boycotting its mechanisms, on the one hand, and building local communities and alliances for political intervention aimed at transforming the macro-systems in cooperative ways, on the other. The key goal of both is the re-appropriation of the resources of creation and the fruits of common labor by the people and for the needs of the people in harmony with nature. This is already happening in all parts of the world and in all faith communities. In this context, Europe is challenged to rediscover the fruits of the struggles of its women's and labor movements and to develop a counter-model to the US version of imperial capitalism, which is taking the European liberal imperialist tradition to the extreme.

Today the new paradigm has to transcend the false Cold War alternative between monopoly-directed private capitalism and centralist state-socialism. It is geared towards the *social appropriation of the earth's resources and the fruits of the common work* – appropriation not in the sense of absolute property rights but in the sense of the basic right of all people to have access to the resources and the fruits of common labor for the satisfaction of their life-needs in dignity.²² This approach could be called a socialism from below or participatory socialism, i.e. not in the sense of a blueprint system to be introduced top down. In Latin America,

after the disastrous consequences of neo-liberalism and given the success of the social movements and new left governments, this is being intensively discussed under the name of “socialism for the 21st century”. This term includes the recognition that the socialism of the 20th century was not socialism but state capitalism concentrating the economic and political power at the top like private capitalism. Both operate within the framework of mechanistic and manipulative modernity like two sides of the same coin. I know that the word “socialism” has been tabooed in the US and in Europe by successful propaganda of the dominating powers building on the obvious failure of “realized socialism” under Soviet influence. Therefore, in the ecumenical and social movements we use terms like “just, participatory, sustainable society” or “Economy in the service of life” or simply “Another world is possible”.

The work towards these alternatives for life in dignity require a *multiple strategy driven by the people starting from concrete struggles for life*, which Korten calls:²³

“Starve the cancer – Nurture life”

I. Starving the capitalist cancer or: withdrawing energy from the system

(1) Demythologize the neoliberal disorientation ideology

Here the majority of European churches lack the prophetic clarity and courage, thus contributing to the “disorientation trauma” of the victims as the relational psychologists call it. “Naming and unmasking the powers” (Wink) in the present context would mean to unveil the contradictions between the theory of the utopian types of capitalism on the one and reality on the other side as well as exposing the cynical and fundamentalist character of the different types of nihilist capitalism.²⁴ This means that the utopian types of capitalism in the tradition of Adam Smith (the invisible hand of the market transforms the egoistic actions of the competing individuals into wealth for all people) can be refuted by confronting the ideology with the reality



showing the “free” market produces excessive wealth for the owners of capital and misery for the majority. The nihilist capitalism in its cynical form (cf. Schumpeter) and its fundamentalist form (v. Hayek) openly admits the sacrificial and destructive character of the capitalist market. So the reality is exactly as predicted by the ideology of nihilist capitalism. Therefore, the only way to refute this ideology is by choosing life against death.

(2) A clear “no” with resistance and refusal to cooperate

Even within the decisions of the Accra General Council of WARC itself there is not yet a full coherence between the basic rejection of neoliberal imperial capitalism in the confession and the action part (covenanting for justice). In the confession it is clearly stated:

(18) **We believe** that God is sovereign over all creation. “The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof” (Psalm 24.1).

(19) **Therefore, we reject** the current world economic order imposed by global neoliberal capitalism and any other economic system, including absolute planned economies, which defy God’s covenant by excluding the poor, the vulnerable and the whole of creation from the fullness of life. We reject any claim of economic, political, and military empire which subverts God’s sovereignty over life and acts contrary to God’s just rule.

Most of the concrete recommendations on the other side are reformist, not defining clearly what has to be rejected not only by words, but by practice. Here the Gandhian methods of organized non-violent direct action should be rediscovered by the churches in alliance with social movements. These actors could also take initiatives themselves. Examples are: boycotting commercial banks involved in tax flight, speculation and increasing of profits at the cost of the working people; calling for boycott of e.g. Coca Cola, when this company is co-responsible for the killing of union leaders like in Columbia or in stealing the ground water of whole regions like in India; another example is the calling for conscientious objection of all Christians regarding the imperial armies of the USA and the EU.

II. Nurturing life in two ways at different levels

(1) Alternatives at local-regional levels transcending capitalism

Here alternatives are already growing on a worldwide scale with initiatives for a “*Solidarity Socio-Economy*” (Marcos Arruda²⁵). They work cooperatively instead of in competition with one another, decentralized instead of centralized. The areas of action are, above all, 1. Local Exchange and Trading Systems (LETS); 2. Cooperative banking; 3. Decentralized production of alternative energies (sun, wind, water, biomass); and 4. Local cooperative production, marketing and consumption.²⁶ Factories, self-administered by the workers, and their networks are also a part of this approach. At this level the local churches would have many possibilities of action. But the local and regional level is not enough. Alternatives are necessary as well at macro-levels.

(2) Struggles for the social re-appropriation of stolen resources and peace at all levels in post-capitalist and post-empire perspective. Given the real power situation in the macro-systems the alternative economy in the service of life and communities as well as an anti-imperialist politics cannot simply be generally “introduced”. The people who are affected must join together with those in solidarity and organize alliances themselves, in order to approach concrete goals and to integrate them into an overall perspective of anti-imperial, societal re-appropriation. Some examples concerning the economic dimension are: the struggle for land and live-giving agriculture, for public goods and services (such as water), for fair taxation, etc. The protagonists, to which people can relate, in order to become subjects in solidarity, are, especially, trade unions, social movements and churches in their diverse social forms.

In these two concrete areas (II, 1 and 2), at the same time, lie the great potential for healing and liberating in the direction of becoming human beings in solidarity for those who have become traumatized, frightened and addicted.²⁷ In this destructive situation, healing is only possible when those who are being healed at the same time know the real possibility of an alternative praxis. Both the local-regional social economy and the alliance-building for the re-appropriation of the earth’s resources and the fruits of common work are centrally based on the creation of real-



life groups and movements for common work and struggle. Groups and movements (with a special importance of women's movements) are the primary forms to regain a life in relationships – against the imperial capitalist ego-society, which drives individuals into a war of all against each other.

As the capitalist imperial system is being enforced by direct, structural and cultural violence (Galtung), the strategies in the economic field must also be linked to the efforts and ecumenical processes of *overcoming violence*. We must make a basic new effort to link again the struggles and networks for justice, peace and the integrity of creation in the Gandhian political sense. Of course, this is being tried in the framework of the World Social Forum (WSF). The ecumenical programs in this direction have been split after 1990. In Germany churches have even used the Decade to Overcome Violence (DOV) to avoid the participation in the AGAPE process (Alternative Globalization Addressing People and Earth). As the program guidelines of the WCC Assembly in Porto Alegre call for a new interaction between the different program priorities we should use this momentum for a new start in the perspective of a multiple strategy to overcome neoliberal imperial capitalism at all levels.

But in order to recapture the clarity and decidedness of the conciliar process for justice, peace and the integrity of creation (JPIC) in the 1980s and contextualize it for the 21st century not only the rejection of neoliberal economy and work for alternatives has to be continued, further developed and implemented in the line of the Accra confession and the AGAPE Document. But the Decade to overcome Violence has to link up again to the clear rejection of the spirit, logic and practice of mass destruction, as formulated in the 1980s, and relate it to the rejection of the spirit, logic and practice of empire as the present form of neoliberal capitalist globalization. The empire openly threatens with mass destruction, indeed, it is already implementing mass destruction. Therefore, it has to be clear in future ecumenical processes that empire as such, in all its dimensions and at all levels from family to super power, is irreconcilable and incompatible with

the biblical faith and the being of the church in the same way as has been stated in relation to neo-liberal economy. The rejection of both must be unequivocal.

Conclusion

A new ecumenical vision for a community of life is not only possible but feasible. As a matter of fact it is already growing in all parts of the world and in all faith communities²⁸, also in Europe.

Europe with its better social and peace traditions as fruits of the labour and peace movements is the only visible power in the world which may have the chance to counter the US type of imperial capitalism.²⁹ Therefore, on the basis of the clear analysis and acknowledgement of the present neoliberal and militaristic policies of the EU the churches here must engage in critical encounters with the European economic and political institutions, but not just “in dialogue with the powerful”. The place of the churches in these encounters is at the side of the people and the social movements in solidarity with them, not at the side of the powers. A new political space can only be won by the people, organising themselves in social and peace movements, trade unions and NGOs, forming alliances of cooperative non-violent struggles (including civil disobedience). The churches in their different social forms can only live up to their biblical calling by joining these alliances – as parts of them are already doing. This will bring conflict, both inside the churches and with the powerful. But only in this way can they be the salt of the earth – as Jesus called them to be – and not the mirror of society, betraying the gospel.



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Notes

¹ Cf. Duchrow/Hinkelammert, 2004, chap.1.

² Cf. Duchrow, 1983, chap.3.

³ Cf. Duchrow, 1992.

⁴ Duchrow/Hinkelammert, 2004, chap.3.

⁵ Cf. Howbsbawm, 1987, and H. Arendt, 1951.

⁶ Cf. www.newamericancentury.org/statementofprinciples.htm.

⁷ Galtung, 1973.

⁸ Cf. Duchrow, 2005a.

⁹ Cf. Duchrow, 2005b.

¹⁰ Cf. Duchrow/Bianchi/Krüger/Petracca, 2006.

- ¹¹ Korten, David, 2000.
- ¹² Polanyi, Karl, 1944.
- ¹³ Cf. Daly, Herman E./Cobb, John B., Jr., 1989.
- ¹⁴ Cf. Hinkelammert, 2001, and Dussel, 1998.
- ¹⁵ Cf. Ched Myers, 1994.
- ¹⁶ Cf. W. Wink, 2002, 14.
- ¹⁷ Schottroff, 1994, 299f.
- ¹⁸ Wengst, 1987.
- ¹⁹ Cf. the pivotal work of Dieter Conrad, 2006.
- ²⁰ Ibid. 217.
- ²¹ Ibid. 65.
- ²² Cf. Zeller, op. cit.
- ²³ Using *Korten's concepts*, op. cit., p. 262ff.
- ²⁴ Cf. Duchrow/Bianchi/Krüger/Petracca, 2006, 30ff.
- ²⁵ Arruda, Marcos, 2003. In Europe this model has a tradition since the 19th century. Since 70 years a whole valley, Mondragon in Euskadi/Spain, is successfully operating in this way.
- ²⁶ Douthwaite, Richard, 1996.
- ²⁷ Cf. Duchrow/Bianchi et alii, part III.
- ²⁸ Cf. Colloquium 2000, 112ff.
- ²⁹ Cf. George, Susan, 2004/2006, 139f.



The following article plus three Bible Studies are excerpts from the proceedings of the 2007 Pacific Council of Churches' General Assembly held at the Kanana-Fou Theological Seminary, American Samoa

Liberating Pacific Communities through Peace and Reconciliation



Mika Paunga

Deliver us, Lord, from every evil, and grant us peace in our day. In your mercy, keep us free from sin and protect us from all anxiety as we wait in joyful hope for the coming of our saviour, Jesus Christ... You said to your Apostles "I leave you peace, my peace I give you. Look not on our sins, but on the faith of your Church, and grant us the peace and unity of your kingdom where you live forever and ever," AMEN. (From the Roman Catholic Weekday Missal)

0.0. Preliminary Remarks

I must admit that I was not given enough time to prepare well for this; hence my tendency to be conceptual and philosophical, lacking in practical and pastoral implications and at times, the inclination to make over-generalization. So what I present is a kind of an 'off the cuff' thesis to generate discussion.

In this spirit of admittance, I admit right at the start that the more politics takes up the theme of reconciliation the more this beautiful concept loses its religious connotations and religious radical force. The more

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politicians talk of reconciliation the more the practice of it is blind to the inherent idea of peace brought about by the fulfilment of the demands of justice. There can never be any reconciliation and by no means any peace and freedom without justice. In the same vein, I also propose the thesis that there can never be any reconciliation without liberation. In this sense, I am inclined to agree with Pope Paul VI when he said in his Encyclical Letter, *Populorum Progressio*, "True peace requires justice and development and the Church cannot remain silent or removed from all issues. On the one hand, the Church cannot claim competence in all secular affairs and specific solutions should not be confused with the Gospel message".¹ The Church must be conscious of her distinctive role as a reconciler, i.e., ministering a gift that goes much deeper than practical solutions.²

Consequently, Church leaders must beware of politicians crying out for national reconciliation.³ They are really asking nations to turn blind eyes to the evil done by those in power and for the people to let bygones be bygones and for those in power to be given the opportunity to continue as if nothing evil had happened. And so we have in our communities two types of citizens: those who are answerable to the law and those who can escape the hand of the law. When that is the state of affairs then reconciliation becomes a farce. Reconciliation can become a practice which encourages evil-doing for other politicians will harbour the thought that when they become corrupt they can also call for reconciliation. This is really an exploitation or the violation of religion by politics; the bringing in of God to cover evil. This political song is quite rife in the Pacific today.

These beautiful and challenging concepts *liberation, reconciliation and peace* are topical issues but deeply biblical and at the core of Christianity. They are often talked about but how real have these been accomplished as a way of life. Is peace achievable at this side of the grave? Churches can be partly blamed for not making a bold stand in their roles of sounding the prophetic voice. At times, sad to say but it is the truth, churches crippled by greed and moral weaknesses are made to turn a blind eye and a deaf ear and so remain speechless in their fear of



being targeted by politicians as not taking the 'blank out of their eyes first'. This has been a strong feature of the Catholic American Hierarchy. Because of the stigma created by so many sexual abuses in the Church, they have not been able to carry out their prophetic role in denouncing the unjust war in Pakistan, Lebanon and Iraq. Hence, what we often hear is no longer the prophetic voice but the protective voice, the voice that compromises the radical force of the Gospel message.⁴ It was comforting to see and hear the Bishop of the Anglican Church in Vanua Levu & Taveuni speaking out during the recent Nurses Strike in Fiji "... the strike actions by the nurses and the teachers cannot simply morally justified."⁵

We are conscious of the gospel of freedom to which Jesus Christ has called us. As Christians, we do know that separation is never a Christian end. Separation must therefore always make room for reconciliation. As Christians we are educated to the fact that the gospel is liberating as well as reconciling, as the author of the gospel, Jesus, is both Liberator and Reconciler. Hence, at the same time Pacific communities are liberated we are called together with all other people of the world to reflect on and live out the mystery of the ministry of reconciliation.

1. Focus of the Paper

This paper focuses, optimistically, on what can be done to prevent conflicts and to sponsor peace in the aftermath of complex political crises in some Pacific communities like Fiji, Tonga and the Solomons, to mention the most recent, with particular reference to issues of reconciliation and peace. As I subscribe to the belief that there can never be reconciliation without liberation and there can never be peace without justice, hence, I will focus on justice as the controlling principle to achieve real peace.

The first part of the paper deals with definitions of terms for positive and constructive concepts like *liberation, justice, reconciliation and peace*, apart from facing the danger of being mere clichés, no longer mean

the same thing to all and especially in the context of post-crises peace-building. Though I may sound 'separationist' to some still I must stress that while there is the need for non-indigenous Pacific inputs, reconciliation is an internal affair in which external contributors should only be present as moral supporters.

It is pivotal that Pacific people themselves construct the agenda of their liberation and their forms of reconciliation. If our endeavour proves successful then it can become paradigmatic for the rest of the world. In this reflection, I am continually conscious of the fact that when we spiritualize or theologize life too much we can be too abstract and so our talks remain mere academic exercises which are meaningless to and exclusive of our flocks who are trying to make ends meet. (*Story about the Indian Parachutist on top of the tree – and theologian walking by- Theologians know the right answers but quite useless*). In the second half of the paper, I would like to highlight two foreign cultures that are influencing the Pacific and spread like wildfire, and yet, we may not be conscious of their presences.

Part I: Definition of concepts

As in philosophy and science, we need to define our terms. This need is made urgent by the fact that many of the terms we use are no longer understood the same by all people. Terms, the meanings of which were obvious in the past are now questioned. We have the concept *good* now under the microscope and taken largely by utilitarian and proportionalist ethicists as an arbitrary concept: *what is good for you is not good for me*. Even the science of *hermeneutics* is stretched to mean more than mere interpretation of facts. Hermeneutics, which is very important to this discussion, now includes the efforts of people to understand one another and to make themselves understood. This is made real by the fact that we now live in multi-cultural communities with multi-socio-political experiences and to understand one another and to live peacefully with each other is really a hermeneutical endeavour.⁶



1.1. What is liberation or the act of liberating?

Liberation means many things to different people. It can have meanings on many different levels. Being free from pain, miseries, anxiety, stress, and anger are spoken of as liberation. The scope of the topic demands that this be looked at in a way that is both abstract and practical. Being inspired by the axiom 'the truth will set you free' and such Gospel texts as "where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Lk. 12:34), I define *liberation* as *discovering and living the truth*. This truth is not relative. It is objective and it transcends time and space.⁷

This is very much in tune with the biblical understanding of liberation. Liberate or liberty, come from the Greek, *eleutheroo*. It means an action by which an individual or a people has been snatched from slavery and become free. While the OT was full of that experienced reality such as (deliverance from Egypt & the return from Babylonia,) the NT never considers quite specifically political and temporal aspects of liberation. It preferred other terms like save or buy back.⁸ Liberty (*eleutheria*) in the NT never means civil liberty. Rather, it consists in the fact that we are children of God (Rom 8:21). This spiritual freedom had been acquired by Christ and communicated by the Spirit (Gal. 2:4; 5:1, 13).⁹

To be truly liberated is to cease to be directed by what is relative or arbitrary in our existence. This is not saying that we live in a vacuum or we step aside from life. What I am stressing is that we do not live as if we own and are dictators of the truth. Volumes of literature narrate characters who arrogantly state: *the truth is what I say it is*. The search for the truth therefore comes to die for such characters and dictators are born. When we have dictators, the public is disheartened and their own searches end in resignation and are therefore, deprived of peace and freedom.¹⁰ On the other hand, the New Testament understanding of liberation is deeply Christological. It believes that it is only Christ who sets people free (Jn 8:32-36; Rom 6:18-22; Gal 5:1).

Armed with this definition of liberation what I am stressing is the idea of Pacific communities freeing or liberating themselves. This accordingly, involves two moments - <liberation from> and <liberation to>. Often this concept liberation has a Marxist ring to it and that it leads to fear of a revolution and the rule of communism. Often also, when we talk of liberation we think of a superior phenomenon setting an inferior free. We talk of two unequal parties. In this, the superior party plays an active role and the inferior party plays a passive role, which is, just receiving his or her freedom. In this we tend therefore to marvel at the act of the superior party and proclaim it from rooftops. The liberating or liberation that I am stressing is one freeing oneself of one's relative existence. This is a search and a discovery; the search for truth and the discovery of lasting peace and freedom. This is a search that is on-going and does not depend on knowledge or possessions or status. It is the search and the discovery open to all human beings, individually and collectively.

When liberation as discovery and living the truth, free of relative existence, becomes our reality then we have equality of all and we can speak of reconciliation, which gives birth to renewal of ways of thinking and new structures of life. We must admit that most Pacific communities are still recovering from post-colonial experiences. The scope of the topic and my belief force me to focus on the leaders of post-colonial Pacific communities. Colonial administration wrecked traditional political structures by the introduction of a way of life that crowns *individualism* and which is safeguarded by such principles like *democracy*, *equality of all* and *freedom of all*. However, we have to be aware of the fact that these proclaimed principles are not necessarily Christian in both foundation and intention.

Then colonialism ended and those who stepped in to take their place, largely paramount chiefs for communities in which authority is inherited, ruled in a way which mixes tradition and modernism. By so doing privileges and benefits which are now apparent become very obvious in their distribution. But their people are already exposed to modernism. Before, in the traditional pre-colonial era, privileges



and benefits were not too obvious and people were happy and proud to give to their chiefs and that their chiefs live better than them. With modern influences people now ask: what about me and my children? People also and not only chiefs or leaders want to experience the *Parousia* here and now. This modernism has its roots largely in writings of German philosophers such as Ludwig Feuerbach, Freidrich Nietzsche & Karl Marx).¹¹

The present social and political structures which mix tradition and modernism are proving to be inadequate in meeting the lived experiences of most of the people in Pacific communities.¹² People have been liberated by education and educated to the ways and blessings of modernism and have become new wine which the present wineskins, the existing political structures, are finding difficult to contain. Recently, we have witnessed some Pacific wineskins bursting.

Liberation therefore, as mindless of relative existence in discovering and living the truth, strips people of the evils of selfishness and opens their eyes to what unites them as mapped out by the truth. This may sound too metaphysical and too abstract but I have to take this epistemological stance if we are to find peace, which is of our own construction and one that is in line with both Pacific and Christian traditions. What is needed, is surgery and not a mere splash of salves on the wound and then covered by a thin band-aid.

1.2. What is reconciliation?

When we speak of reconciliation, we are admitting the fact that conflicts do arise in human life and reconciliation is present as a way of solving conflicts. All cultures have a form of reconciliation embedded in their very structures. What comes easily to mind is the Samoan *ifoga*,¹³ the Fijian *bulubulu*¹⁴ and the Tongan *hu lou ifi*.¹⁵

From a biblical point of view, according to K. Unterner, Reconciliation is about the right ordering of persons and things so that all things achieve their purposes. This requires all things to be ordered in view

of the incarnate word who, has become not simply part of creation, but its center (Eph 1:9-10). Salvation history is the story of God committing himself more and more deeply to his creation, that it might achieve perfect reconciliation with him. At the center of this plan is the incarnation. Jesus Christ is the completely comprehensive reality that embraces all of creation.¹⁶

Reconciliation is more than just a juxtaposition of created realities in peaceful co-existence. Rather it is a radical and definitive reordering that can be accomplished only in Christ, the ontological principle of unity. Creatures are reconciled with one another because they are reconciled with God. Paul was clear on this point when writing to the quarrelsome Corinthians. In seeking their reconciliation with one another and with him, he asked that they participate more deeply in the profound reconciliation achieved by Christ:

So, if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation; everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us.¹⁷

The word, reconciliation itself, does not appear in the Old Testament but its books are full of reconciliation in practice. We read of God often rendering his forgiveness when he encounters the failures of his people. God forgiving the waywardness of his people is reconciliation: when reconciliation happened, the people who had suffered due to their waywardness and forgetfulness of God, experienced peace and prosperity.

We have been schooled to learn and believe that the once-and-for-all act of reconciliation, the definitive reconciliation, took place with Jesus Christ. In and through Jesus, God no longer counts our trespasses against us and God entrusts the message of reconciliation



to us (2 Cor 5:19). This action of God in Jesus is a new creation; everything has become new (2 Cor 5:17). Reconciliation, therefore, entails renewal, which corresponds to justification, sanctification and the commissioning. Reconciliation is intimately connected to peace as its fruit. In their ministry, the commissioned preachers of the Gospel must strive to be the builders of the peace that they proclaim.

In his letters, St. Paul returns repeatedly to the theme of reconciliation and in Ephesians 2:11-22, he gives us his teaching on reconciliation in its finest expression. Addressing the gentiles St Paul proclaims that Christ 'our peace ... has broken down the dividing wall'. The gentiles are now members of the Chosen People on an equal basis with the Jews; the era of separation and hatred has ended, for all people reconciled to God in Christ form 'one body' and 'one holy temple'.

Jesus underlines the radical demands of this reconciliation: the sinner reconciled by God cannot offer acceptable worship to God unless he first goes to be reconciled with his brother or sister (Matt 5:23-26). This beautiful and challenging vision of reconciliation highlights the close connection between reconciliation and peace. Jesus Christ speaks of a threefold reconciliation: the personal reconciliation of those saved by him; the inter-personal reconciliation between God and people, and between people themselves. The parable of the *Prodigal Son* gives us a beautiful dramatisation of this threefold reconciliation (Luke 15: 11-32).

Time and the scope of the topic do not allow for the luxury of a reflection on the first two of the stated threefold reconciliation; suffice it to say, we can never speak honestly and convincingly of peace if we are not at peace with ourselves. The same also applies in our case with God. Suffice it to say, reconciliation is part and parcel of the religious fabric of our beings as humans. Hence, we can never speak meaningfully of reconciliation minus God. It is God who reconciles us and continues to reconcile us in and through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit.

1.3. Reconciliation between People

Inter-personal reconciliation entails peace with others. It is my harboured belief that constructing peace must involve recalling the past and keeping that memory alive in order not to repeat errors that have given rise to tension or violence among people and communities. Pacific communities are still recovering from the colonial experience. This experience saw the bringing in of people of other races to work at other places and they make these places their homelands and so we speak of multi-cultural societies. When the colonial era ended people of different cultures inhabiting the same land had not learnt to accept each other and be at peace with one another. The colonial masters are partly to be blamed for keeping them apart. It was to ensure maximum profitability from the new people who were kept largely in estates. The Indo-Fijian experience presents us with a classic example as well as the Bougainville situation one and half decades ago.

Having brought that example up let us focus on it for a time. Have the people of Fiji with the two main cultures accepted each other and are at peace with one another? The coups give us the answer to our posited question. Would talking to both cultures about the reconciling love of Jesus Christ bring them together? I opt to disagree. Hindus and Moslems are proud of their own faiths. So how can religion help; how can God help his people in Fiji live together in peace? The coups speak loudly of the failure of religion and reason to move the hearts of people to try to solve problems through peaceful means. Though unfired but the power of the guns have been resorted to.

People need to know that force leads to violence and violence leads nowhere and never represents a fitting reaction to problems. Violence is a lie. It contradicts the truth of religious belief and the truth of our nature as rational and orderly beings. Violence often destroys what it claims to defend or to win: the dignity, lives and freedom of human beings. And as often proved, those who suffer the most after the experience of violence are the poor and weak.¹⁸



I believe that abiding by the truth and justice of God, incarnated in Jesus Christ, which is mindless of relative existence and expressed in dialogue, negotiation and making serious attempts to understand each other and why others are different, represent the most effective plan for constructing peace. All these must be done with eyes open to issues of justice and respecting human rights and dignity. (See the Appendix below)¹⁹

Part II: Liberating and Reconciling Pacific Communities involve Liberation from Ignorance and Belittlement

My friend and philosopher Fr. Falani Terry SM, is not selling the idea of *<liberation from>* because he thinks it is reactive in that it is a response to a problem. What he is selling is *<liberation to>* which is pro-active and preventive: hence, his thesis of liberation as discovering and living the truth. The theologian in me whispers a resounding voice saying to me, those two belong to the very essence of Liberation. It is both reactive and pro-active. Because liberation is primarily from God, I argue that liberation is primarily *<a liberation from>*.

Our freedom and liberation are “participated ones” in the liberation that God has given us as part of his creation and more importantly divinized in and through the whole Christ event. God is the source and bringer of liberation. Thus, biblically speaking as we have seen, we do not liberate ourselves because we are incapable of doing so. Scripture tells us that man could not make himself free through knowledge or through any initiation into a mystery religion or through any myth. He was in bondage to evil powers, to sin and death. He is somehow, seen as a slave to corruption (2 Pt 2:19.) He could not free himself, indeed, without the Spirit, (Rom 7:7-25). Thus, it is clearly God who frees man from the Law (Rom 7:3-6; 8:3; and from sin and death (8:2).

It is clear from these texts that <freedom from> is link intimately with what Paul said “they might become instead “slaves” of Jesus Christ (1 Cor 7:21f, 39; Gal 3:3:28, 5:1), hence <freedom to and for Christ>. In this way, the Christian obtains access to justice and holiness. In the final analysis, it is God, who liberates us from ourselves, and from the Law, sin and death. It is only Christ who sets people free, (Jn 8:32-36; Rom 6:18-22; Gal 5:1). In doing so, we are therefore able to discover the truth and live by it, because truth is nothing other than God.²⁰

With those words, I would like to highlight two modern cultures that have invaded not only Christianity in the Western Countries but also the Pacific in recent years. These two cultures are basically un-Christian in foundations and orientations. The two cultures have infiltrated every fibre of life and have spread like wildfire in the pacific already. The sad thing about it is the fact that our people are completely ignorant about their presences and influences. The two cultures are both anti-Christian in doctrine and philosophy. In a word, they claim themselves to be complete and absolute.

The two cultures, therefore, clash with Christianity and with all traditional cultural values. Without our conscious knowing, they are largely responsible for the current world problems and especially with the socio-political problems and confusions in our Pacific countries today. These two cultures are the Enlightenment Rationalistic Culture and a New Global Ethic. There is an urgent need for pacific peoples to become aware of these two cultures and be educated about their influences in our lives in the hope of freeing ourselves from their subtle negative influences.

2.1. A Clash of Cultures - Enlightenment vs. Christianity

The world is witnessing a new imperialism in the making since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. With the fall of that wall, we experience what perhaps one may call the rise of “*PAX AMERICANA*”. This ‘American Peace’ is an imposition of a “New World Order”, consisting of a Uni-polar political (democracy), economic and cultural



system for the whole world. This new American Peace is underpinned by its military might. The current war in the Middle East is the freeing of the world for globalization or for the New World Order. It is interesting to note that this new order excludes God, and human beings as well as nature as unessential. This is more than a clash of cultures. Rather it is the domination and imposition of one culture on all.

Some describe this as the clash of civilizations and the remaking of world order. This is the thesis of the author of the best seller, Samuel P. Huntington, in his book *The Clash of Civilizations*.²¹ He speaks of increasing clashes between the West and Islam, and between the West and the Sinic (China) civilizations.²² The current invasion and occupation of Iraq as well as the growing tension between the US and Iran are clear examples of this clash of civilizations. The clash, though, is caused and instigated by the *Pax Americana* imperialism. However, according to Professor Johan Galtung, the founder of the Transcend Institute for Peace & Reconciliation:

It is a complete mistake to talk about this as a civilizational-religious clash only. It's economic, military, political; it's the full house. The more one says the "clash of civilizations", the more one is inclined to forget the economic, political, military interests hidden underneath. It must be wonderful for Washington to have all this clash-of-civilization-talk and establish 14 military bases, and then try to put your paw on all the oil. "Keep them discussing civilization".²³

In the same vein, I think Pope Benedict VI has the best insights into this crisis of cultures. I agree with him that it is not so much a crisis based on religion. Islam is not necessarily anti-Christian. Fiji is an example at hand. Christianity and Islam live peacefully together. However, this is the deceptive mantle often put out by the media as the cause of the current tension between the West and Islam. It is certainly not a question of Islam challenging Christianity. Rather it is a clash of cultures. He thinks that the greatest clash of cultures now

being experienced is the Culture of Enlightenment versus Christianity. The culture of Enlightenment and its positivistic philosophy,²⁴ the material alone is real, represents the biggest threat to Christianity and to all religions for that matter.²⁵

The Pope's position can be summed up in the following way. This philosophy, positivism, is anti-metaphysical in character, so that ultimately, there is no place for God in it. The consequence is that people no longer accept any moral authority apart from their own calculations.²⁶ People's capability determines what they do. If you know how to do something, then you can do it. However, if this human expertise does not find its criterion in a moral norm, it becomes a power for destruction. We already have many examples of this today. People know how to use human beings as "storerooms" of organs; hence, they do so because their liberty demands it. They know how to build atomic bombs, so they make them. They know how to clone human beings so they do so.²⁷ According to Pope Benedict, this philosophy and its definition of liberty, that initially seemed capable of expanding without any limits, leads in the end to the self-destruction of humanity and liberty itself.²⁸ This culture grew out of Christian Europe. Pope Benedict fittingly describes the source of this new culture in the following words:

If, then, it is true to say that Christianity has found its most efficacious form in Europe, it is also true to say that a culture has developed in Europe that is the most radical contradiction not only of Christianity, but of all the religions and moral traditions of humanity.²⁹

Furthermore, the Pope says that while we can say that Europe once was the Christian continent, we can also say it was also the birthplace of this new scientific rationality, which has given both enormous possibilities and threats. On the one hand, this new culture has led to the geographical unity of the world, meeting of cultures and continents during the age of great discoveries. This same rationality has left its mark over the whole world today, due to the achievement of its



scientific technological culture. This scientific rationality is imposing uniformity on the world.

On the other hand, this scientific rationality has developed a new culture that was previously unknown to humankind: it alienates God from public awareness; hence, God is irrelevant to public life and cannot be its foundation. It denies completely the existence of God and considers it improvable and uncertain. It maintains that what is rational is only that which can be demonstrated by scientific experimentations. That leaves morality and religion as irrational at best. This culture, to reiterate, has attempted to construct a human community in a manner that absolutely excludes God.³⁰

Furthermore, this culture claims itself to be complete without needing any other cultural factors to complement it. It therefore has a claim to universality. The “Rights to Liberty” is the core of this culture.³¹ Liberty is its starting point. Liberty is the fundamental value and criterion for everything else. It claims the freedom of choice in matters of religion, which includes the religious neutrality of the state; the liberty to express one’s own opinion, the democratic ordering of the state, the freedom to form political parties; and finally the protection of human rights and the prohibition of discrimination.³² Therefore, there is no higher value than that **human rights, democracy and freedom, be respected everywhere**. These three are the heritage of the Enlightenment and the languages have Christian roots.³³ These have now seemed to replace God in public life. This culture is already well – established in the Pacific.

2.2. A New Global Ethic

Very recently, there is reference to another new global cultural revolution or a “**New Global Ethic**”. It has imposed itself since the end of the Cold War. The fall of the Berlin Wall accelerated it immediately to become a Hot War fuelled by oil and greed. Various new paradigms, words, norms, values, lifestyles, educational methods and new governmental processes belonging to this new ethic, spread globally and have won the day by now. It is post-modern and globally normative.

It already rules the world's cultures. This new global ethic has not been carefully analyzed or discerned; hence, it has spread like wildfire to the remotest corners of the globe. It has its new concepts and a new language.³⁴ Many of these concepts have become the common language even in Fiji today. No longer can any one deny the predominance of these concepts in contemporary cultures:

Globalization with a human face, global citizenship, sustainable development, good governance, consensus building, global ethic, cultural diversity, cultural liberty, dialogue among civilizations, quality of life, quality of education, education for all, right to choose, informed choice, informed consent, gender, equal opportunity, equity principle, mainstreaming, empowerment, NGO's, civil society, partnerships, transparency, bottom-up participation, accountability, holism, broad-based consultation, facilitation, inclusion, awareness-raising, clarification of values, capacity building, women's rights, children's rights, reproductive rights, sexual orientation, safe abortion, safe motherhood, the right approach, win-win, enabling environment, equal access, life skills education, peer education, bodily integrity, internalization, ownership, agents of change, best practices, indicators of progress, culturally sensitive approaches, secular spirituality, Youth Parliament, peace education, the rights of future generations, corporate social responsibility, fair trade, human security, precautionary principle, prevention... ³⁵

We do not have to condemn or endorse many of these concepts and words altogether. However, a closer look at this new global language, one is awestruck immediately by the exclusion of terms specifically belonging to the Judeo-Christian tradition, such as:

Truth, morality, conscience, reason, heart, virginity, chastity, spouse, husband, wife, father, mother, son, daughter, complementarities, service, help, authority, hierarchy, justice,



law, commandment, dogma, faith, charity, hope, suffering, sin, friend, enemy, nature, representation...³⁶

According to the report, this new global ethic has taken the place of the universal values on which the international order has been founded in 1945 after World War II and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights established in 1948. The supreme value of this new culture is the *right to choose*, a purely existential and immanent principle.³⁷ Furthermore, according to the report, "The global ethic posits itself *above* the authority of parents and educators, even *above* the teachings of world religions. It bypasses every legitimate hierarchy. It establishes a *direct link* between itself and the individual citizen – the proper of a dictatorship."³⁸ Today, the handmaid of this culture is the NGO's working together with and under the United Nation (UN). So beware of NGO's!

We are still trying to rise from the devastation inflicted on us by colonization and globalization and now we have new devastating cultural forces at bay. They will certainly add more confusion to the ones that we are encountering already. In this context and in view of the future of Oceania and this Assembly, I would like to pose the following questions for further discussions:

- ☀ How are we going to liberate Pacific Communities from these two new cultures, something that the Western countries do not know how to handle? It has already strangled Christianity in Europe in a significant way.
- ☀ What hope is there for Oceania if the two cultures have already invaded and conquered the Western minds and hearts?
- ☀ How are we going to survive in a new culture that would like to see God eradicated finally, from the public life of humanity and Oceania in particular, and shut God up in the subjective sphere of cultural residues from the past?
- ☀ How much of the current crises in the Pacific today and the need for reconciliation, have as their sources, these two cultures?

Imagine the damage and further isolation this is going to inflict on the people of Oceania if people are not aware of them and if they are not subjected to serious scrutiny! We would do well to remember the wisdom of Johan Galtung, this is not just “a civilizational-religious clash. It’s economic, military, political, it’s the full house.”³⁹ These two cultures are inherently active at the nerve-centre of the current socio-political and cultural crises experienced by the pacific countries today. Liberating our people from these two cultures would mean liberating our ignorance. It would mean a thorough analysis and an immediate study of it.

2.3 Liberated from Belittlement

I would like to believe that our Pacific countries have become more aware now concerning all sorts of belittlement and demeaning generalisations of us as being too small to survive the onslaught of Economic Globalization; we are angry and proud people; we are less intelligent, poor and lazy. We just like to play sports and enjoy life. Therefore the only way for us to survive in the future is migrate or to emulate the “White Man’s / Woman’s Culture”. They continue to degrade and relegate us to become completely confused and ill at ease in our own countries and even tempting their confused disciples to rebel against our cultural values. This statement seems to support that concern:

Our young people seem to feel that the best way to make it in the world is to break the rules. Our Pacific becomes a suspicious environment. Modernity has come to mean a disconnection from tradition, the “white man” and missionaries are seen as the source of the problems, there is also the rejection of modernity and change and too many rights to be protected and everything becomes permissible. It also marked the end of the “tribe” and the beginning of urban life. Such a situation creates confusion and anxiety among our people.⁴⁰

It is important for us to understand the source of this confusion. It has an anthropological, ideological, political and philosophical history.



I think it is appropriate to point out here that all these generalizations and tactics are founded on a flawed anthropology. In order for Pacific peoples to understand what is going on now there has to be a systematic analysis and study of that history. We can never forget, deny or bypass our past and our history. This is not to create a nostalgic longing for the past. In particular, the focus has to be on highlighting the fact that what we are living and experiencing now is in the words of Peter Kanyandago, "a product of conjugated historical and anthropological processes..."⁴¹ Those historical and anthropological ideologies have to do with the Western claim to superiority and universality in its life. Unfortunately, this is still very much with us today in the Pacific; even after 200 years of Christianity. This means that many of the problems that we are facing in Oceania now are recent in origin. This is not to say that the pre-European contact periods had no problems. It is trying to say that Oceanic societies before the advent of Europeans may have had resources both culturally and spiritually that were denied or placed aside but can help us now to navigate through this overwhelming sea of cyberspace and modern telecommunications. It is therefore incumbent to study both past and present in order to find meaning to help Pacific peoples survive in the current impasse and welcome the future with optimism or hope. In a word, to liberate us from the history, attitude and anthropology that would like to continue belittling and demeaning us.

I think we should all take to heart what the Tongan scholar, Professor 'Epeli Hau'ofa said in his little thought-provoking book *A New OCEANIA, Discovering Our Sea of Islands*:

Oceania is vast, Oceania is expanding, Oceania is hospitable and generous, Oceania is humanity rising from the depths of brine and regions of fire deeper still, Oceania is us. We are the sea, we are the ocean, we must wake up to this ancient truth and together use it to overturn all hegemonic views that aim ultimately to confine us again, physically and psychologically, in the tiny spaces which we have resisted accepting as our sole appointed place, and from which we have recently liberated

ourselves. We must not allow anyone to belittle us again, and take away our freedom.⁴²

3. Concluding Remarks

1. The first thought that invaded my mind when I was given the topic was: *liberating Pacific communities from what?* We have to admit that many factors enslave Pacific communities but I believe that the topic has parameters: the crises that have recently surfaced in some Pacific communities. Of course many views have been expressed which have tried to rationalise the situations. Such rationalisations point to cultural differences, religious differences, tribal differences, economical differences and levels of education differences to name the most popular as the causes of the crises. But what is the real cause? It is greed. Greed has turned sufferers to be violent and also in some cases turned those in power to guns to cover up the finger and foot prints of their greed. Therefore, if I am to give an answer to the thought that first crossed my mind then I have to say “liberating Pacific communities from leaders controlled and directed by the power of greed.”

2. When we live the truth, which is mindless of our relative existence we think less of ourselves and our needs but more of others and it is being mindful of others that we discover our true selves. When people learn to discover and live the truth then they are educated by the past and are ready to reconcile and so look forward with hope to a peaceful future.

3. On the other hand, today we are becoming more aware of two new cultures namely the Enlightenment culture of Scientific Rationality that pushes God out from life and the New Global Ethic fashioned out of recent UN programs and ideologies. Both cultures have one thing in common; the fulfilment of the wish of the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche: man has become god. It has threatened to eliminate the God of Jesus Christ as well as Christianity. Both modern cultures are materialistic, hedonistic, individualistic, incomplete and irrational.



They lead only to self-indulgence and self-destruction. These two cultures will be more devastating for the people of Oceania if they continue to operate unnoticed and unattended to. The ambivalent identity that we have now as a consequence of colonization, westernization and globalization will eventually push Oceanic peoples further to become rootless, cultureless and without identities.

4. What is the role of the Pacific Conference of Churches in the light of this new clash of cultures? For us Christians, I think the vision of Pope Benedict XVI may be apt for facing the current cultural forces trying to put God out from our Pacific world. It is appropriate to remember his wisdom when he said, that the Enlightenment philosophy with its related culture of scientific rationality is incomplete, it is not rational, nor universally valid.⁴³ The Pacific Conference of Churches would do well to take heed of the Pope's words of wisdom when he said:

Our greatest need in the present historical moment is people who make God credible in this world by means of the enlightened faith they live. The negative testimony of Christians who spoke of God but lived in a manner contrary to him has obscured the image of God and has opened the doors to disbelief. We need men (& women) who keep their eyes fixed on God, learning from him what true humanity means. We need men (& women) who keep their eyes fixed on God, learning from him what true humanity means. We need men (& women) whose intellect is enlightened by the light of God, men (women) whose hearts are opened to God so that their intellect can speak to the intellect of others and their hearts can open to the hearts of others. It is only by means of men (& women) who have been touched by God that God can return to be with mankind (*humankind*).⁴⁴

We have an urgent mission at hand as far as PCC is concerned. The new cultures need to be evangelized bearing in mind the vision of Pope Benedict. It is my hope that our Pacific peoples would once

again stand tall in the face of this ungodly and inhuman threat. We need to resurrect some of our noble traditional ways of reconciliation and wisdom as mentioned above. I am not too certain why we are not utilizing them in our current search for peace and reconciliation! We have resorted ourselves somehow to Western means only in the famous axiom "Democracy and The rule of Law". On the other hand, we need to put an end all sorts of belittlement through creative reactions.

Finally, I believe that Pacific communities true liberation, reconciliation and peace, do not lie in any political systems or materialism, nor is it in the scientific rationality of the Enlightenment culture or the New Global Ethic. In the end, they are all self-defeating to humanity. God alone, in and through Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit is the true liberator of our Pacific Communities from current social & political crises. I hope this paper has made this crystal clear.



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6. Appendix

Suggestions by Mr. Aisake Casimira

General Comments

- ◆ A conflict happened, relationships tested and broken, and instability ensued.
- ◆ People take positions (for or against) reasons given, and possible solutions suggested if at all.
- ◆ Influencing factors: proximity, blood, geographical, religion, etc.

For resolution to happen, there are important observations that need to be stated.

Observations

- ◆ Highlight intermediaries, their role and responsibilities
- ◆ Negotiation of issues
- ◆ Allowing time for a possible acceptance of forgiveness
- ◆ Presentation of a *Koua* (ritual) to seal the re-establishment of the relationship
- ◆ A period of truce whereby accommodation of changes in the relationship are internalised.

Key Components

- ◆ Analysis: Resources, power, identity
- ◆ Actors: Intermediaries, communicators,
- ◆ Processes: Communications, protocols, languages
- ◆ Markers: traditional markers: the times for talks (negotiations), rituals, recovery periods, etc)

Factors to be Aware of

- ◆ Factors to be aware of when:
- ◆ Multicultural vs. hegemony
- ◆ Diversity vs. uniformity
- ◆ Procedural vs. value
- ◆ State vs. particular

7. A POETIC LAMENTATION

O My Beautiful Nuku'alofa *Terra d'Amore* – Land of Love Dedicated to My God, my King and Country

Words cannot explain how I gaze you ablaze
How your beauty has been blood-stained and defaced
My land of love - Nuku-'alofa, you have become tears of blood
Your fire of love has become fire of destruction
O! my land of love, what have you done?

The news of your desolation resounds through the universe
Aching my soul with an immense abyss of sadness
Why have we allowed impatience, madness and unruliness
To rule over reasonableness, calmness and friendliness,
O! my *Terra d'Amore!*, what have you done?

Your face is so disfigured that I could hardly recognize you
Your very heart carved open by hands emanating from you
I am relegated to numbness, lost for words, shocked to base
Stealing, looting, burning, demolition, am put to silence
O! my Nuku'alofa, look at what they have done to you!

Democracy! how can you rise up and proclaim victory
Amidst ruins, dead bodies, heart aches, now your responsibility
Is this your true nature to resort to fire, blood and force to win?
It sounds more like Beelzebul, a far cry from justice,
has claimed its sting.
O! my Friendly Islands, look at what pro-democracy
has done to you!

My beloved! how can burning and pillaging become
means for democracy?
How can killing be termed freedom of expression
and freedom of speech?



How can demolition and violence become love and justice
for a country?

My Kings, ancestors and forefathers, rise up, hear and see
The loud and inconsolable cry of your beloved country

O dignified Democracy! Where is your authenticity?
Your noble values lie in respect of human dignity
and human property;

Protector of truth, human freedom, life and its sanctity;
Upholder of justice and non-violent, in a multicultural society;
Defender of the poor, the voiceless and the rights of the minority
O true and fair Democracy! Where on earth have you been?

O! my Nuku'alofa! if only you could see the tears in my eyes
If only you could hear the solitude sound of my cries
If only my heart could be laid bare before you
So you can see it aching and wailing in love for you
O! My Nuku'alofa

O! My once friendly isles, my land of love,
How can I soothe the aches and pains that I feel for you?
How can I possibly sing a love song for you?
When your heart of love, kindness, friendliness
have been rid of you?
O! My Nuku'alofa, my *Terra d'Amore!*

O! my beloved Tonga *ko e fonua malu*²,
How can you destroy the foreigners who *fakamalumu*³ in you?
When your own sons and daughters everywhere
are foreigners too,
Yet never have they been subjected to such barbaric rule,
O! my land of love, how can this be spoken of you?

My Tonga, my Nuku'alofa, my Friendly Islands!
Where is your wisdom, *fofola e fala kae fai e talanga*⁴
Where are your noble values of respect, calmness & forgiveness?

Have we replaced them with impatience, greediness
& personal gains?
O! my noble Tongan values, O please stand up, speak to me,
where are you?

My Tonga, my Nuku'alofa, my land of love,
If I forget you, let my whole being wither
How can I forget you and prefer foreign systems and gods to you?
Have you gone mad because you have been unjustly treated?
Or have you gone astray because you are
greedy and power hungry?

Let me renew my covenant with you
Let me once more have some respect for you
Let me rise now with new songs of justice
Of love, of hope and of peace
My Nuku'alofa, my friendly islands

Behold! you have neither silver nor gold,
You have the *fe'ofa'ofani*, *fetokoni'aki*, and *sefaka'apa'apa'aki*,⁵
Sharing, reciprocal love, wonderful hospitality and *angai-kainga*⁶
These are your God-given silver and gold,
These are your God-given source of happiness and joy

My beloved King,
My beloved Tonga,
My beloved country,
My friendly isles
My God fearing people
My land of love,
My Nuku'alofa,
Though you have been deeply wounded,
Severely scarred, debased and defaced,
I love you still,
I treasure you still,
I still call you: MY VERY OWN!



A poetic tearful lamentation at what has befallen in our beautiful island.
By Fr. Dr. Mikaele Paunga SM, 500 7th Avenue, San Bruno, CA
94066, USA, on the Eve of Thanksgiving, November 22, 2006. My email
contact: mpaunga@hotmail.com
@Copy Right is Retained by the Author

Notes

¹ Pope Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio*, n. 87. See also Vatican II Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, 1965, n. 54; and the Synod of Bishops, *Justice in the World*, 1971, pp. 42-42).

² See also K. Unterner, "Reconciliation", in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 2nd Edition, pp. 955-596.

³ This was a feature of the crisis in Tonga at the beginning of the year. Here in Fiji it is quite a prevalent music that some Chiefs and politicians have been playing recently, even last week, the Chief of Naitasiri who got involved in the 2000 coup put out a statement on the Fiji Times calling the people of Fiji to reconciliation.

⁴ During my sabbatical last year, I was following a renewal program with 20 American priests. This was the reason that most of them told me for their ineffectiveness. In addition to that, they all have a wrong notion of patriotism.

⁵ Bishop Apimeleki Qiliho, "Public Goods held Hostage," August 2nd, 2007, Media release.

⁶ Cf. *Framework for a Theology of Hope*, pp. 17-20.

⁷ The English word truth is found at the convergence of two currents of thought, the Hellenistic and Semantic. From GK, *aletheia*, means to be hidden, signified the unveiled reality, the subsistent being that could be known, correspondence between the reality and the spirit. According to Semitic tradition, the Hebrew *emet*, from *aman* means to be solid and stable, designated the one in whom one could trust. On one side, it is an objective reality, a timeless truth; on the other, it is withstanding the wear of time. From the Greek the opposite of truth is error or lie; for Semitic, it was the breaking of the bond between two persons. See Xavier Leon-Dufour, *Dictionary of the NT*, San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1980.

⁸ Cf. See Xavier Leon-Dufour, *Dictionary of the NT*, San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1980, (Mt. 17:26; Rom 7:3, 1 Cor 7:39; Jn. 8: 32-36.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Our discussion group in the preparation of the paper on the Theology of Hope discussed truth in the following way: In a situation of conflict and consensus, where is truth to be found? The truth can be seen as evolutionary and, hence, there are different truths for different times and for different generations. Something can be true for now but may not be in ten years time. There is what is called scientific ideas of truths and what we may call religious truths which we may hold to be absolute. Consensus is one way of arriving at truth but consensus in itself is not truth. It is a process whereby we negotiate a temporary agreement for now to enable us to live peacefully. People adopt different truths for different times. There is also the scientific way. Consensus is a bridge that leads, not to the only truth, but to other truths. In addition to this issue of consensus, we also need validation - an institution, an authority, to validate our knowledge of truth. But, at the same time, we need tolerance for a free flow of ideas. Consensus can be tested by the actions that follow, to see if the decision was consensual or not. We need to establish a system of truths and the processes at arriving at them, p. 19.

¹¹ Cf. Ludwig Feuerbach, *Essence of Christianity*, Harper Collins, 1985. See also Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, translated by R. J. Hollingdale, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1961.

¹² Johannson-Fua, J., "Looking Towards the Source: Social Justice and Leadership Conceptualizations from Tonga," Unpublished Paper. The consequent of an irrelevant curriculum according to a recent research is "the continuing rate of young people leaving school without formal qualifications or skills that will enable them to earn a livelihood within their own communities." The reason for this according to the report is due to a discrepancy between the knowledge systems in formal education – which is heavily based on foreign knowledge systems – and societal knowledge systems – which is based on local skills, knowledge and values. Curriculum must once more insert the study of Pacific Cultures as obligatory. All our Marist schools must redesign their curriculum to address the new devastating cultures infiltrating the Pacific today. In this regard, we have the vision developed in the Island of Hope as alternatives to the current economic globalization. The education department at the University of the South Pacific is already working along this line.

¹³ In an interview with the Samoan Philosopher, Fr. Falani Terry SM, he said that *ifoga* is the Samoan very meaningful way of seeking reconciliation. It



takes place when a culprit requests forgiveness for a major transgression. As a sign of contrition, the culprit is covered with or wrapped in an Ie-Toga and presented by his family chief or village council to the offended family in an ifoga (submission). When the submission is declared accepted by the offended chief, that is the victim accepts the Ie-Toga, the culprit is set at liberty, having been fully pardoned. The submission ceremony is considered as an act of surrender, and a true sign of repentance and a pleading for forgiveness. Although this act of asking forgiveness by means of submission is not declared illegal and is still being done, no chief council or family is allowed today to pardon anyone in the case of a murder or any other such serious crime. The established courts of justice act on such cases as prescribed by the law. Interview with the author, August 28, 2007, Varani Street, Suva, Fiji Islands.

¹⁴ Rev. Tevita Banivanua explained this concept *Bulubulu* in the following manner. *Bulu* is to bury. It also means the underworld or world of the spirit. *Bulubulu* is to ask permission to bury whatever differences may have caused the conflicts. Given at SPATS Office, Suva, Fiji Islands, August, 24th 2007.

¹⁵ Gifford described this *hu lou ifi* in the following manner: "No compounding for the crime of raping a young girl was tolerated. If a daughter of a high chief was raped and the culprit knew that the chief had knowledge of the fact, the man would go and tell his whole family of what he had done. The family would ask the grandson of the chief to intercede, and wearing the girdles of *ifi* leaves around the neck and waist, would go to the father of the outraged girl. The man and his family would sit down outside the chief's house bow down their heads and send his grandson in to him. The grandson would call out the chief's name and say: "Excuse me. These people have come there with me. Excuse me, don't be angry, or if you are angry do what you like to me, but let these people go free"... if the chief were clement, the affair was ended... It was customary for a chief to forgive, even if the offender was a commoner; other chiefs would laugh at him if he did not. But perchance the seducer were not forgiven, he would be killed at the first opportunity." See Edward Winslow Gifford, *Tongan Society*, Honolulu: The Museum, 1929, pp. 184-185.

¹⁶ Cf. K. Unterer, "Reconciliation", in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 2nd Edition, pp. 955-596.

¹⁷ See St. Paul's 2nd letter to the Corinthians Chapter 5:17-19).

¹⁸ Both the recent happenings in Tonga and Fiji are clear examples of this. At the end of the day, it the poor people who suffer.

¹⁹ See the suggestions made by 'Aisake Casimira at the end of the paper.

²⁰ Interesting reading here is the little book of M. K. Gandhi, *Truth is God*, Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 10th reprint, 1997. He believes very strongly that Truth is God. Gandhi believes that truth is “what the voice within tells you.” How then can different people think of different and contrary truths? Because the human mind is not the same for all, it follows that what may be truth for one may be untruth for another... Everyone should therefore, realize his limitations before he speaks of his Inner Voice. In order for one to know the truth, one must take the vow of truth, purity, non-violence, of poverty and non-possession. In other words, truth is not to be found by anybody who has not got an abundant sense of humility. If you would swim on the bosom of the ocean of Truth you must reduce yourself to zero. Cf., pp. 14-15.

²¹ This work was first published in Great Britain by Simon & Schuster UK Ltd, 1997.

²² *Ibid.*, see the illustration in his book on page 245.

²³ John Galtung, “What Comes After the U.S. Empire”? Introductory speech at the TRANSCEND International Meeting – 6-12 June 2007, Vienna, Austria, p. 5.

²⁴ Prof. August Comte is the source of this positivistic philosophy. See his work *A General View of Positivism 183-42*, translated by J. H. Bridges, Robert Speller & Sons, 1957.

²⁵ See Joseph Ratzinger, *Christianity and the Crisis of Cultures*, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2006.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 41-42.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

³¹ We would do well to note that this notion of Liberty is not of Christian origin. It is hedonistic, selfish and individualistic.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 34.

³³ Martha Zechmeister, “Crisis of Christianity – Crisis of Europe?” in *Concilium*, 2005/3, 60.

³⁴ Institute for International Dialogue Dynamics, *The New Global Ethic: Challenges for the Church*, Marguerite A. Peeters 2006, see abstract.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 15.



³⁸ Cf., *The New Global Ethic*, p. 18.

³⁹ *Op.cit.*, p.8. The more one says the “clash of civilizations, the more is one inclined to forget the economic, political, military interests hidden underneath.

⁴⁰ Cf., Position Paper “To Whom shall We Go, Charting Hope in the Pacific, A Pacific Theology of Hope Framework”, Discussion Paper prepared for the 2007 Pacific Conference of Churches General Assembly, September 2007, American Samoa, p. 18.

⁴¹ Peter Kanyandago, “The Experience of Negation of Particularity and Africa’s Struggle for Survival,” in *Chakana*, 1 (2003), 47.

⁴² Eric Waddell, Vijay Naidu & Epeli Hau’ofa, ed., *A New Oceania: Rediscovering Our Sea of Islands*, Suva: University of the South Pacific, 1993, p. 16.

⁴³ J. Ratzinger, *Christianity and the Crisis of Cultures*, pp. 41& 43.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

⁴⁵ Land of love

⁴⁶ Safe land or place

⁴⁷ Take refuge

⁴⁸ Spread the mat and talk candidly (*talanoa*)

⁴⁹ Reciprocal love, helping & respecting each other.

⁵⁰ Quality of behaviors that befits the fact that we are closely related.



Rosalyn Nokise

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BIBLE STUDY I: Atua, Empower us to be Liberating Communities

Our theme, which asks God to empower us to be liberating communities, presupposes firstly that there is a need for liberation – that life is somehow under threat – that bondage and oppression are realities for us in our region. Secondly it presupposes that we should be involved in that task of liberation. It is a theme that presupposes that we **want** to do something about the threat to life in our communities – at least something **more** than what we are doing at present! And finally, it presupposes that Atua, the one who is beyond all we can conceive, is the one who will take us beyond our selves, to be liberating communities.

Given these presuppositions I looked in scripture for a context which portrayed a situation where people were living in bondage and oppression, where the life of the people was itself under threat and where we can see God empowering people to be agents of liberation. To this end I have sought inspiration from the book of Exodus – the great story of God's loving act in liberating the people of Israel who were captive under Pharaoh.

Exodus 1:8–2:10

⁸Then a new King came to power over Egypt, one with no experience of Joseph. ⁹Thus it was



he said to his people, "Just look: the people of the sons of Israel are numerous and more powerful than we." ¹⁰ My advice is that we outsmart them before they become so many that in the event of a war they could join themselves indeed they could - with those who hate us to do battle against us. Under such conditions they might even escape from the land."

¹¹Therefore they set taskmasters over them to oppress them with forced labour. They built supply cities, Pithom and Rameses, for Pharaoh. ¹²But the more they were oppressed the more they multiplied and spread, so that the Egyptians came to dread the Israelites. ¹³The Egyptians became ruthless in imposing tasks on the Israelites, ¹⁴and made their lives bitter with hard service in mortar and brick and in every kind of field labour. They were ruthless in all the tasks that they imposed on them.

¹⁵The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiphrah and the other Puah, ¹⁶"When you act as midwives to the Hebrew women, and see them on the birthstool, if it is a boy, kill him; but if it is a girl, she shall live." ¹⁷But the midwives feared God; they did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but they let the boys live. ¹⁸So the king of Egypt summoned the midwives and said to them, "Why have you done this, and allowed the boys to live?"

¹⁹The midwives said to Pharaoh, "Because the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women; for they are vigorous and give birth before the midwife comes to them."

²⁰So God dealt well with the midwives; and the people multiplied and became very strong. ²¹And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families.

²²Then Pharaoh commanded all his people, "Every boy that is born to the Hebrews you shall throw into the Nile, but you shall let every girl live."

2:1 Now a man from the house of Levi went and married a Levite woman. ² The woman conceived and bore a son; and when she saw how beautiful he was, she hid him like

a treasure for three months.³When she could hide him no longer she got a papyrus basket for him, and plastered it with bitumen and pitch; she put the child in it and placed it among the reeds on the bank of the river. ⁴ His sister stood at a distance, to see what would happen to him.

⁵The daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the river, while her attendants walked beside the river. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her maid to bring it. ⁶When she opened it, she saw the child. He was crying, and her heart went out to him, "This must be one of the Hebrews' children," she said.

⁷Then his sister said to Pharaoh's daughter, "Shall I go and get you a nurse from the Hebrew women to nurse the child for you?"

⁸Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Yes." So the girl went and called the child's mother. ⁹Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Take this child and nurse it for me, and I will give you your wages." So the woman took the child and nursed it. ¹⁰When the child grew up, she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, and she took him as her son. She named him Moses, "because," she said, "I drew him out of the water."

This passage chosen from the early chapters of Exodus, powerfully contrasts the forces that seek to destroy life one on the one hand and those which bring hope and deliverance on the other. In a sense this short passage both summarises and foreshadows Gods act of liberation for all of human kind. To achieve this, the passage uses powerful images to emphasise the life saving power of God.

The story begins with **fear** – fear which is the opposite of hope – the fear of the Egyptian King – a fear fed by his human insecurity and his need to maintain power. Fear leads Pharaoh to maintain power by first crushing the spirit of the Israelites through hard labour and when that is not enough by then seeking their annihilation – by undertaking a campaign of genocide. Pharaoh seeks to wipe out the people of Israel – Theologically this stands in utter contrast to Gods great promise of a multitude of nations, of people



more numerous than the stars. The **promise of life** in all its abundance on the one hand and the threat of complete **annihilation** on the other is the central conflict of this passage. This conflict sets the theme not only for our short passage here but for the whole unending love story of Gods liberating work for all of creation. This conflict and its resolution are portrayed through the story of five women.

Fear drives Pharaoh to order the midwives to kill all male babies as they are born to the Hebrew women. Mid-wives – their role is one of being with women to assist them in the bringing forth of life. They are agents of life but Pharaoh orders them to be agents of death. Let us hear their story;

The Mid-wives

My name is Shiprah, which means “Fairness.” My partner Puah, and I were deeply fearful when called by Pharaoh and ordered to kill any baby boys as they were born to our Hebrew women. Our job as mid-wives is to be with women, to help them as they bring new life into the world. I feel like it is a sacred role, it is an honour to be part of God’s miracle of life. So I was scared when Pharaoh ordered us to kill the babies. So was Puah. Yes we were both scared, we couldn’t believe what Pharaoh ordered us to do . Life comes from God and it is not ours to take! All life is sacred, each baby is made in the image of God – it has been created with love by our Maker’s hand. Each life is part of the promise God made to our ancestors Abraham and Sarah, and it is our sacred duty and privilege to honour God’s gift of life.

Yes, and the women they trust us; it is our job to preserve and nurture the life they carry within them. It is our job to stand with them and support them as they bring that new life in to the world. It’s a hard enough job giving birth under normal conditions – under Pharaoh it is even more critical; we do our bit. We can’t betray that trust!

Yes, we are life bearers – we could never kill any child. We are called to ensure that the life God has promised survives - healthy and strong- to live the life God intended. So we

couldn't obey Pharaoh – we had to make our plans to ensure that the baby boys survived. We made up a story to tell Pharaoh that our Hebrew women are too full of life – too strong - that they give birth before we get there. Its true anyway – our women **are** strong, they are survivors and they fight for the life that grows within them. We will fight with them - support them all the way!!

The midwives were not paralysed in their fear– rather they were women of great courage – they took the risk of disobeying Pharaoh, because they would not deny their divine calling to be life deliverers. They refused to go along with evil – they chose resistance in order to bring hope and liberation where there would otherwise be despair.

The Mother of Moses

We turn now to one of these mothers who fought for the life of her child – a woman who gave birth under the threat of Pharaoh's genocidal decree – that all baby boys be thrown into the river

I am Jochebed. Maybe you didn't know that was my name – others just know me as the mother of Moses. I come from the priestly line of Levi, my husband too is a Levite. We are a God-fearing family and know God has promised ours to be a people as numerous as the stars in the heavens. God does not fail in his promises; he will strengthen us and guide us to save our son. God's wisdom will guide and strengthen me. God has given us this gift of life to grow inside of us – so I know God has given me the gifts to protect and nurture this life. That is the gift of being a woman. I might be a slave, I might be poor and own nothing but God gives me the gift of life.

I have watched with much fear as Pharaoh has been trying to kill us off. I have seen other mothers loose their sons, so when my boy was born I could not bear to let him go. He was my precious treasure so I took the risk of hiding him until it was no longer safe for him to stay in our home. Then I had to think of another plan to save my son. Where would he be safe from the eyes of Pharaoh? ...then it came to me



– the last place they would look for a living baby would be in the river. That was the place of death for Hebrew boys – they would not look for a living baby there. It was hard to let him go, but I knew that if he was to survive it had to be out in the open, if he remained in hiding he would not survive.

I protected him though by preparing a special ark to keep him safe in the water. Just as Noah built an ark in the time of the great flood to save his family, so I built a small ark for my son that he too might be saved from the forces that seek to destroy him. He will be warm and safe, I trust God's plan for us and I will do my bit.

Jochebed risked all to save and protect her son, her courage, creative thinking and skill enabled her son to survive. She saw her being a woman as a gift from God – to bear life - Jochebed took strength from her life bearing gift to ensure that her son lived that life God intended for him; she used her skills to weave a protective ark for her son so he would survive in the world.

The Sister of Moses

And then there is the fourth woman -Moses sister - the one who stood by her brother, watching over him as he floated on the Nile; let us hear her story; *slide 23*

I'm Miriam, like my parents I am a Levite – a people who serve God. I knew early on of the struggle for life that faced my people; not only are our living conditions hard, our lives are burdened with long hours of harsh work and we have little food to eat. But worse than that, life itself is under threat. My friends have lost their brothers and I was scared that I would lose mine!! He is so sweet, but I have to put my finger in his mouth to stop him from crying out loud. I have to watch outside the house for signs of Pharaohs spies – everyday I used to think this day might be his last.

Then my mother had this great plan about hiding him in the river. I said I would watch over him and report to my mother – it would be too obvious if she was on the river bank watching. My heart was beating so hard as I saw the

Pharaoh's daughter come down to bath – right at the place where my brother lay among the reeds! I crept up close as I dared – I saw the smile on the Princess' face as she opened the ark and found my brother. It was now or never, so I took the chance; I stood up, came out of hiding and spoke boldly to the Princess, for my brother's life was at stake! "If you wish, I can find some one to feed the baby for you" I said.. My gamble paid off and I was able to take my brother home openly and my mother was able to keep feeding him and nurturing him. My brother was no longer dead to us – he was alive. I will never forget that day – I thank God for the strength and courage to speak out when it really mattered.

The young Miriam – spoke out when it really mattered – she made a difference – her quick thinking enabled her brother to grow up with his family – to learn his faith – to know where he came from. The young Moses was safe for now but there was more to come; The Egyptian Princess had secured his safety but she was to also play a critical role in his development.; let us hear her story; *slide*
24

The Daughter of Pharaoh

I am a Princess. Most people just call me Pharaoh's daughter, one born to privilege and luxury. I have never known hardship; everything I want, I usually get. So when I found this little baby in the river, still alive but crying his heart out, I had no hesitation but to take him for my own..

When I opened up the basket my heart just jumped out to this poor little boy – all alone. I knew he must be one of the Hebrew children, I knew his life was in danger, I was not blind to what my father was doing. So I was determined that this child would not die – he would be my son and he would live. I would do everything I could to give this child a good life. It was lucky a young Hebrew girl offered to find a wet nurse for him – for all I know it could have been his family re-claiming him but the main thing was the boy would live!!



When the boy grew up the wet nurse brought him back to me – he was a fine young boy and I took him as my son - I called him Moses – in Egyptian this means to bring forth a child – but I like its Hebrew meaning – to draw out of water – I like the double meaning of his name when you put it all together – I brought forth a son because I drew him from the water. He was my child born from the water. The main thing was – he was saved, he was alive.

Living with me at the palace Moses was able to learn to read and write, he had a good education and he developed the skills of leadership. He learnt the ways of my father – how the system works – he could understand its strengths and weaknesses. He learnt how to survive. I like to think it prepared him well for his future.

He had a rough start in life, no one should have to fight those odds to survive - It meant going against my father- but I wanted to use my position and all I had to give this boy back the life that my father sought to take.

Help came from where it was least expected; from the heart of Pharaoh came the final step in securing Moses survival. The child of the death dealing pharaoh ensured the safe and final birthing of the Hebrew child who would go on to save the children of Israel – Gods people. A story that begun with fear lead to hope.

In this story we see not one saviour – not just one liberator – but five – five women who ensured the hope of Israel was not lost – five women who believed in the sanctity of life – and took risks with their own life rather than let fear have the final word. Five women whose combined actions brought hope and life. In his sense they were people empowered to be part of a liberating community, and in this sense we have much to learn from this story if we too are to be empowered to be liberating communities.

The task of reflection for us now begins; to consider the important questions and challenges this passage poses for us. The life of Israel was under threat and a group of women - some of whom were God fearing, some God serving and one who was the enemy

but allowed her heart to be moved – all were responsible – collectively for the survival of the one who brought hope. They kept hope alive, they modelled life giving action. If we begin our reflection with the context of life under threat – a situation our Assembly theme presupposes within our own context – How is life under threat in our communities today?

Take three minutes to discuss this with the person sitting next to you.

We, your family at PTC have spent some time reflecting on how we experience life under Pharaoh today, what the primary threats to the life of our children are today – What threatens the life of our communities? So we bring a poem to share - composed by a group of us for a service last term; – it is a Psalm of Lament for our Islands:

Psalm of Lament

*Lord our defender, merciful and mighty
You generously provided us with the rich heritage of these islands
We have failed to treasure it due to our lust for money and prosperity.*

Our beautiful trees are exchanged for money, culminating in the erosion of our land

Oh our islands wounded; where will our help come from?

Turn to God our Creator who is our Island of Hope

The beautiful beaches that we enjoy are contaminated with used oil and chemical waste

The freshness of the air has been polluted with industries' exhaust outlets

The tide which brings joy for the children is now a threat for the existence of our small islands

Oh our island is sinking; where will our hope come from?

Turn to Atua our Creator who is our Island of Hope

*Our rational mind claimed wealth as our accomplishment;
which led us to a selfish life, instead of loving our neighbour as ourselves.*

The greed to gain the most profits resulted in the rich getting richer and the poor getting poorer.



Our barter and reciprocal system which strengthen our communal life is being replaced by individualistic principles.

Oh our island is collapsing; where will our help come from?

Turn to Atua our Creator who is our Island of Hope

In our distress we call to you Lord

That you may answer us.

Deliver us O God from the ways of violence that plague our islands today

The riots, the coups, the corruption –

Fear grips at the heart of our island; where will our hope come from?

Turn to Atua our Creator who is our Island of Hope

In our fear we turn to you O God

Our children are drinking of this violence,

They see rule by the gun and the might of the dollar;

Of these things they drink and learn

Our islands taste only the bitterness of corrupted power

Hear our cry O God

That we may drink again from your well of grace and hope

That our children may live the life you made them for

where will our help come from?

Turn to Atua our Creator who is our Island of Hope

The Lord our Creator is a generous and a loving God who is always slow to anger but swift for forgiveness

He gives hope for those in despair and liberty for the oppressed

His love is constant and makes impossible things possible

He is the author of all creations, who makes all things visible and invisible.

Oh Creator God our island is destroyed; and you're our Island of hope

When our women at PTC reflected on this issue one of the biggest single threats they saw to their children's survival was cultural genocide; the values that have sustained them and their families for generations are being fast eroded. At the forefront, the capitalist system is seen as the modern day Pharaoh, enslaving us in a system where we are constantly under pressure to work, work, work, so that we are so tired, we have no time for our children. We give all

our strength and energy to build up the system and not the family. The church also came under some heavy criticism in this regard; leaving no time for family where relationships are nurtured, where love is first learnt and experienced and where the stories of our people and the wisdom of our elders is passed on.

If we are unable to produce for the system we find ourselves sitting on the edge barely surviving, having to make desperate non-choices to put food on the table for our children. Many children cannot go to school because there is so little money to even feed the family. Those of us who are migrating in search of a livelihood we have become removed from our land – we have no family supports to carry us. Some of us do things that we don't want to talk about so we can have food and clothing, pay the rent and send our children to school.

Television is a powerful medium of this genocide and is a key tool in Pharaoh's destruction today. Television - because there our children are exposed to a globalised culture that does not reflect their reality and therefore it undermines the very skills and values that have been life giving in our communities; values such as family, reciprocity, communal accountability and decision making, working as a community, growing our own food, valuing of elders, honouring relationships, love of the land, celebration. Television watching – in its very nature can be a very individualised and anti-communal activity. It can become the sole source of knowledge; gone are the opportunities for storytelling and wisdom sharing.

The life threatening global disease HIV-AIDS is slowly and silently creeping in to our communities, our families are very vulnerable – our young people who feel they risk nothing risk their very lives; and our communities are vulnerable where work such as seafaring and trucking industries separates family members over vast distances and long periods of time, creating opportunities for the spreading of disease.

As women we noted that there are also things **within** our cultures and churches that threaten our lives. We are fearful of the violence that comes from within, especially when the Bible is used to justify it. This is a human abuse of God's word. We know it is not



God who oppresses us but rather human constructions of power. Some of us are physically beaten and we die; others of us have our lives destroyed by sexual abuse at the hands of those whom we trusted. Others of us have suffered a slow death from mental and psychological abuse; our spirits have been crushed – we are shells of the person God made us to be; and now we see our children abused – our daughters robbed of their childhood.

We see the violence in our communities and the use of force in governing our countries. This is not what we want for our children – they grow up learning the power of the fist, the gun and the dollar. Like the midwives we are faced with a choice to give in to violence and so become part of its brutal regime or to make a choice for life, and put all our efforts in to ensuring safe and healthy lives for our families.

Each of our islands have their own particular threats which have their roots in the global capitalist system which craves consumption of power at any cost; the cost we bear here in the rising sea levels that are claiming our very islands, in the affects of nuclear testing which are killing our people, our marine life; the unsustainable logging that strips the land and silts up our rivers and lagoons; and the mining that takes us off our ancestral lands and leaving the land scarred, and wounded - our life giving eco systems are being destroyed.

We also recognised that within ourselves there is a fear that stops us from choosing for life – that prevents us from taking risks – to labour for new life for ourselves and our communities. Sometimes we can hold ourselves back, we can suffocate the new life that is rising up within us – because we are fearful.

In our passage from scripture we see five women empowered to choose for life amidst the fear and oppression under which they lived. So we now reflect on what we can learn from these women.

The Mid-wives

What is the role of a mid-wife – no doubt we have different experiences of mid-wives – in different places and different times -

but I ask you to spend a couple of minutes to share with your neighbour – how the role of a mid-wife has been understood in your community – what are the names given to midwives in your communities and what do they mean?

Mid – wives are those who deliver life

- In Hebrew – it is the one who “brings to birth” – the one who brings forth
- In Maohi – *ha’afanau* – to be driving or steering the process of giving birth
- In Tongan – *Ma’uli* - comes from the word *uli* – to steer – to direct
- In Fijian - *vu-ni-ka-lou* – the source of life-giving, and *yalewa vuku* - woman of many talents and gifts
- In French *Sage Femmes* & also the German – means – wise woman

Mid-wife – to be with women – to support and encourage – to be in solidarity with – to reassure in fear and pain. It is an empowering role in being with a woman as she brings new life into the world; giving direction, support, reassurance; a spiritual role.

How do we see ourselves as midwives for our communities today? It is about standing in solidarity with those who are labouring with life. Being mid-wives for our communities is about:

- Guiding them;
- Encouraging them;
- Helping our communities birth new life, new possibilities, new hope;
- Taking risks in bringing about new life; and it is about not compromising with brutality and violence, but acting to save life.

Jochebed

How did Jochebed act to save her son?

- She loved her son
- She worked out a plan
- She recognised that if her son was to survive it had to be in the open, in the world
- She risked letting her son go



- She protected him – by building him an ark – so he would stay afloat on the waters of the Nile

What do Jochebed's actions say to us about our role as parents and elders of our communities today?

As parents and elders of our communities;

- We are to be “Ark Builders;”
- We have to risk letting them go in to the world;
- But we protect and prepare them to navigate the turbulent waters of today;
- Saving life.

We are people of many skills and talents, let us build arks – *vaka* – for our children today

- So we prepare our children to survive in the world
- So our children can navigate the turbulent waters they will face

Like Jochebed we need, as parents and elders of our communities, to prepare our children to surf the waves of globalisation that are pounding our shores so that they survive with cultural integrity, assured but also wise to the ways of the world so that they will survive. Just as Jochebed could not keep hiding her son we cannot hide our children away from these realities but rather we need to teach them to think critically with their faith and culture – to equip them with the tools of survival - to build them “arks” that will bear them afloat as they navigate the waves now pounding our shores.

Miriam

What action did Miriam take? What motivated her?

- Miriam loved her brother
- She was very aware of what was at stake- her brother's life – the hope of her people
- She patiently waited
- She read the signs – on the Princess's face
- She took a chance
- She thought quickly
- She came forward out of hiding
- She spoke out

Being in tune, she was able to act quickly – courageously and appropriately – to save her brother’s life and **bring him back alive** to his family

What can we learn from Miriam if we are to be leaders in a liberating community? *Take a few minutes to discuss*

- Taking the voices of our young people seriously – they make a difference;
- Being aware of what is going on around us;
- Looking out for each other – as brothers and sisters;
- Being guardian angels;
- Risking speaking out for each other when really matters;
- Being advocates;
- Risking being in the right place at the right time – to save life; and
- Sisters and brothers – watching out for each other.

Like Miriam our young people are perceptive and quick thinking; maybe they see things which we cannot. We need to trust their judgement, knowing that they choose for life. In many of our cultures we have people with special abilities who sense what is going on, they are very in-touch with their surroundings and are sensitive in reading what is happening. Sometimes we may be wary of such people because we are not sure if their insights are of God. However, we should trust how the Holy Spirit works to gift people with life saving abilities – to see what the rest of us are unable to sense. Even if we do not have this special gift God will empower us as we become sensitive to what is happening around us and act to bring life.

Princess

What happened when the Princess heard the cry and saw the face of the baby in the river? What did she do then? What risks did she take? How do we value the contributions of those we see as being on the “other side”? How can we use our own positions of leadership to draw those at risk of drowning from the water?

- Her heart was touched;
- She reached out in compassion despite the risks;
- Her face to face encounter lead to encounter her own humanity,



- She was changed to be open to allies in unexpected places, allowing for the heart of others to be moved.

So we should recognise that we do not need to continue the oppressive and destructive structures and traditions that we may inherit. We the Church may sometimes be the problem and so change to become ground breakers of hope within our institutions

- Allowing our hearts to be moved and to act for life - looking beyond our own self interest;
- Acting for life even if it means going against one's upbringing;
- Using our position and resources to prepare for a new future;
- Choosing where we stand and how we act;
- Being a ground breaker – working from inside, and
- Taking risks and being courageous to save lives.

Being empowered to be a liberating
community; What and who stops us from
being empowered?

Let us look at Pharaoh's leadership

- What motivated and drove Pharaoh's leadership?
- What does fear do to a community?
- What impact does it have on us as leaders?

Fear – makes us blind, deaf and unfeeling;
– leads us into destructive behaviours;
– holds us back, and
– prevents us from trusting God and each other.

At PTC our women identified three things which broke community among themselves – when we shared this with our men - they responded that they are far worse in these behaviours than women. We offer these for the consideration of our ecumenical community.

• **Gossip**

• **Pride**

• **Self Interest**

Being Empowered

- Why didn't the women let fear stop them from acting?
- What gave them strength for these risks they took?
- How can we as leaders be strengthened for risk taking for the sake of our communities?

Alternative Models of Leadership

What models of leadership for liberating communities are offered by the women of the story?

- Midwives
- Jochebed
- Miriam
- Princess

Being Empowered for Life Giving Leadership – How?

- Trusting in the faithfulness of God with us in the midst of our struggles
- Treasuring the sacred nature of all life
- Being in tune with what is happening
- Being led by our heart - compassion
- Getting involved
- Ready to act to save lives
- Ready to take risks

Models of Leadership for a Liberating Community

Pharaoh's death-dealing leadership,

- seeks self-security;
- is driven by fear, insecurity and the need to maintain power;
- uses fear and force; and
- creates fear and insecurity.

.... is contrasted with

- risk-taking leadership

Mid-Wives' leadership that...

- Works to bring forth life;



- acts in solidarity;
- makes life a priority rather than comfort or job-security, and
- saves life

A Mother's Leadership

- Life Giving and protective
- Plans for the future
- Provide means for survival
- is life saving

A Sister's leadership

- Aware;
- Watches out for, and
- Speaks out to make a difference – saving life.

Leadership from inside the system

- is ground-breaking;
- is led by compassion not fear;
- chooses life even when it goes against family and social power structures; and
- uses position and power to make a difference.

A community of five women who made a difference

- Acting together makes a difference;
- Everyone's contribution is vital;
- Value each other; and
- Working together – the ecumenical task.

Working together; a colleague working in HIV/AIDS advocacy in Suva passed on this piece of wisdom in relation to our need to work together;

*Blowing out someone else's candle
doesn't make your own shine any brighter
Instead it makes the world a darker place*

So, let us light up the world together! Each candle counts; let us recognise each other's gifts and roles; let us then be liberating communities of:

- Midwives
- Ark Builders
- Brothers and sisters
- Guardian Angels
- Ground Breakers ... valuing each and everyone.



BIBLE STUDY II

“Atua, Empower us to be Liberating Communities”

Introduction

In the Name of God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit. Amen. To God be all glory, honour and praise now and forever. Amen.

The Moderator, Deputy Moderator, the General Secretary, partner churches, leaders of the Pacific Churches, members, participants, the hosting churches and friends. First of all I would like to thank God for the gift of life, protection and calling to be part of the 9th PCC General Assembly. Even though the obstacles were many, the affirmation was greater. My journey to PCC has been an empowering and liberating experience. I also would like to thank the General Secretary of the Pacific Council of Churches Rev. Valamotu Palu for the invitation to be part of the Bible Study Team, together with my fellow sisters in the Lord Rev. Rosalyn Nokise and Mrs. Galoane Ta’ase.

I wish to thank Rosalyn for such an empowering study yesterday, and such creativity and style of presentation which set the stage ready for today. We praise God for her and the community of PTC. I hope and pray that whatever the Holy Spirit has placed upon my heart to share today will contribute further to empowering and liberating one and all.



Mereia Votomosi

Rev. Mereia Votomosi is an Ordained Minister of the Methodist Church in Fiji. Mereia has held various departmental and parish appointments within the Church. She is presently a lecturer at the Davuilevu Theological College.

Following my presentation we will spend 15 minutes sharing in groups, and a further 15 minutes where the groups will present a summary of their discussion.

Personal Reflection of the Theme

Firstly, the theme is a prayer of intercession, a request that God intervene in the affairs of and relationship among the 26 churches and 7 councils of churches. She confesses and acknowledges her need to be empowered for the divine task entrusted upon her by the head of the Church – Christ himself. She is to be a liberating community, an enabling community, and agent for healing and restoration. Secondly, it is a prayer of trust and confidence in God, recognizing that He is the source of empowerment to guide PCC to be liberating communities. She affirms that all she needs is found in God and God alone.

Reading: Galatians 6: 11–18

¹¹“See what large letters I use as I write to you with my own hand!”

¹²Those who want to make a good impression outwardly are trying to compel you to be circumcised. The only reason they do this is to avoid being persecuted for the cross of Christ. ¹³Not even those who are circumcised obey the law, yet they want you to be circumcised that they may boast about your flesh. ¹⁴May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. ¹⁵Neither circumcision nor un-circumcision means anything; what counts is a new creation. ¹⁶Peace and mercy to all who follow this rule, even to the Israel of God.

¹⁷Finally, let no one cause me trouble, for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus.

¹⁸The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers. Amen.



Connection with yesterday's study

In yesterday's study we were challenged to be liberating communities through the various models presented to us: to be midwives, ark builders, brothers and sisters, guardian angels and ground breakers – valuing each and everyone. Our second study endorses wholeheartedly that empowerment and liberation is found in the valuing of each other. But how can that be possible because everyone has a different set of value system. For example

1. **Race:** Fiji is a multi-racial country, where the two dominant races are Fijians and the Indians. The value systems of these two races are contradictory in nature; especially in regards to their religious and traditional values. For example, for Fijians pig, cows and bullocks are for feasting, but for our Hindu brethren they are sacred animals associated with their religious belief so they are not eaten. Muslims, like Jews, consider pigs to be unclean.
2. **Gender:** yesterday's debate about the election process for the Moderator and Deputy Moderator indicates that the values system of men and women are different. The murmuring and non-verbal communication that followed is an indication that gender-wise, men and women do not see eye to eye.
3. **Status:** There is value in the status and not in the person. We have our hierarchical system in government, tradition and church; therefore there is an unwritten form of grading to the status in accordance with the ranking. Our Prime Minister Qarase, before the coup, was escorted and guarded wherever he went. Now he is an ordinary citizen, just like you and I. Fiji once reported him cutting copra in his home island. I suppose it will be the same for the status now held by the PCC or our home churches to a Sunday School teacher or someone who collects garbage. What will happen when you and I retire and someone else takes up our position? How will we be regarded then?
4. **Denominational:** the values of the mainline churches in relation to the para-churches. The mainline churches value worship in quietness; para-churches value a lot of music (sometimes loud) and interjection of 'halleluiah' and 'amen' now and again. Some value baptism by immersion in the river while some sprinkle from

a cup of water.

5. **Personal:** Two of the values of the Fijian Government, and I suppose all governments, are money and education. If you have money then you are successful. There is classification of the government that if you earned below a certain amount then you are considered to be living in poverty. My father's family was considered as living in poverty. Then I began to wonder, is my worth, my value, equal to money? This means that Mereia = money. Therefore if there was no money then I ceased to exist. I had failed one of the major exams in school so because I have failed, therefore I am a nobody. No education, no Mereia. My worth is in my education.
6. **Church:** the taboos of the church; no homosexual, no lesbian, no single mothers, no man impregnating single girls or molesting young girls and being in prison and many more. But my very close and extended families are involved in this and much more. And I am part of this family; therefore I am also an immoral person. So the rational is our worth and values depends on what happened to our bodies if girls or women, and if men, it depends on their past history. The values of women and girls are equal to the scars on their bodies. For example, if a girl's virginity is her worth; you take that away and she is worthless, and the same goes for a woman who is raped, or a child who is molested. Another example is the expectation that women should be virgins when they go to their bridal chambers, but it is normally okay if men have sexual intercourse with a few women. These are examples of different values systems.

So how can we value one another if our value system is different?

The focus of Galatians

The Galatian churches were non-Jewish and multi-ethnic, something like the composition of the PCC General Assembly. Paul, when writing to the Galatians, shares his concern about their value system.

According to sociologists, value systems are mechanisms for



survival, master-minded by guardians or custodians of communities to ensure the preservation and continuity of their own kind. It is socialised into the social structure of the community as a rite, and whenever the rite was enacted it strengthened the value system of that community and so ensured their preservation even to the next generation.

There are two sets of guardians or custodians in regards to values in the Galatian churches, and both were masterminding values that would preserve and ensure the continuity of their respective communities. There was Paul on one side and the Judaizers on the other side. The Judaizers were the custodians of the Jewish nationalistic values, while Paul's was the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ and the values associated with it. Therefore, there were contradictory value systems in the Galatian churches which were creating confusion, hurt and enslaving the community. Paul was reminding them of the value system that he had first instilled into them when the Gospel of Jesus Christ was first preached. And he was challenging and encouraging his congregations to reconsider the value system that they had adopted and was strongly nurtured within the Galatian communities. Members became weak and worldly because, for them, Christianity had become the observance of the Jewish nationalist rite of circumcision, food laws and the observance of religious festivals. For the Galatian converts, Christianity was maintaining and keeping alive the Jewish nationalistic identity, the values of the Jewish people which were very exclusive in nature regarding people who they could socialise with (even though they were non-Jews [Gentiles] themselves). Now they could not mingle with their own kind if those people were not circumcised. Now they were concerned with the way food was prepared before they could eat it, and with whom they could sit during mealtime. Now there was a boundary marker and it was based on racial criteria. So their value system was based on the Jewish nationalistic and religious system. Paul realised that if he did not act quickly, he would lose his Christian converts forever. Paul was very disappointed with his congregation, but still he wanted to right the wrong. He was persuading the Galatian churches to seek empowerment to be liberated from such observances and to adopt

a set of values that would ensure a lifestyle that was liberating.

Paul, the custodian and guardian of the gospel of Jesus Christ masterminded a value system that would ensure the preservation and continuity of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Paul is asking them to consider that:

- God as the only source of empowerment;
- what is empowerment in itself; and
- what it means to be liberating communities – our theme for our PCC General Assembly.

God the only source of empowerment

Where does our source of empowerment come from?

Do we use our race, gender, status or the rule of the gun, or money or education, denominational strength in terms of numbers, or anything else as a source of empowerment?

For Paul, this is his stand: “Those who want to make a good impression outwardly are trying to compel you to be circumcised. The only reason they do this is to avoid being persecuted for the cross of Christ. Not even those who are circumcised obey the law, yet they want you to be circumcised that they may boast about your flesh” (v. 12). Paul was trying to pinpoint or draw the attention of the Galatian churches to the motive behind the Judaizers’ mission amongst them. There was a group moving amongst the Galatian Christians who depended on the nationalistic and political values for empowerment. Biblical scholars called them Judaizers. Their immediate and foremost concern was political freedom. Their values were very different. They used the congregation as a stage to make their political intention a reality. Therefore they would follow Paul wherever he went and compel all his non-Jewish Christian converts to observe Jewish religious rites such as circumcision, food laws and the observance of religious festivals. The rationale behind this movement is if the Gentiles were observing the values of the Jewish nation; then they were not a threat.

Can we reflect for a moment and ask ourselves; are we using the church as political mileage for our own nationalistic zeal? For Paul



his source of empowerment is always the cross of Jesus. "May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me and I to the world"(v.14).

For Paul, God is the one who, in Jesus Christ, died and rose again from the dead. When Paul talks about God it is always in terms of the crucified Christ and the resurrected Christ. The book of Galatians has six chapters; and 134 words in those chapters describe or express the Christ-event. When I say Christ-event I mean, Christ's death and resurrection.

So for Paul, God is an event, a happening, an occurrence. God is an experience because dying is an experience and living is an experience. Although this event is a historic one; its power still affects him. Paul remains crucified to the cross. As long as Paul remained focused on the cross; his empowerment was sure. Shift his focus and he was weak. So for Paul, the origin or the fountain of his empowerment is in the cross of Jesus. How could Paul connect himself to this source that he says is God alone, and particularly the Christ event? His connection to the source of empowerment is faith in Christ and Christ alone. Jesus died for him and was resurrected for him. As long as his focus was on this Jesus who died and rose again, he was connected to this source. For Paul it was faith and faith alone.

Empowerment is a process of dying to the values of the world

"May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is new creation" (6:14). Paul, in writing to the Galatians, was encouraging them to see that real empowerment began when the process of dying to the values of the world was in motion. As long as Paul remains fixed to the cross then he was empowered to die to the values that were once so dear to his heart.

In Galatians Paul had made a very radical and revolutionary statement about circumcision. It can be likened to what Commander

Bainimarama did in Fiji when he suspended the Great Council of Chiefs. It is like suspending all the traditional values/authority in the Pacific. That is exactly what Paul did. All the values and worth attached to the Jewish people were no longer an issue for him. For Jews he could be a Jew and for Gentiles he could be a Gentile; for slaves he could become like a slave; for women he could become like a woman; for youth he could become like a youth. For Paul race, gender and status was no longer an issue (Gal 3:29). All these values were crucified on the cross. Paul's dying to these values did not happen in a short span of time but was a 17-year process (as recorded in the second chapter of Galatians). He allows Titus to accompany him to Jerusalem but does not enforce him to be circumcised.

Remember at one stage in his life this same Paul was ready to kill and persecute the Christian church. He approved of the death of Stephen. But now his death to his value system, especially in terms of its exclusiveness, is complete. Death is a process whereby one ceases to be. For some it is a long and painful process, for others it is sudden and swift. No one can die your death; no one can die my death. It is a personal journey between an individual and God. It is a lonely experience. But for Paul, this dying process to the values of race, gender and status is empowering. That is the definition Paul would use if he were here today – empowerment is the dying process of the values that we hold so dear in our hearts, in terms of race, gender and status (Gal. 2:20).

Liberating Communities

For Paul, to be liberating communities is to discover their worth, the worth of one and all, and this worth is measured by the Christ event. One's worth and the other's worth is in the Christ event – found in Christ's death and Christ's resurrection. To be a liberating person and community is to stop imposing standards of this world on the other in order to make them worthy. Liberating communities are made up of individuals who have died to the values of the world and have allowed the values of Christ to be resurrected in them. Gal. 2:20 "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but



Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” They become the vehicles or channels of the living Christ himself for they cease to be because the death process is going on. The beginning of liberation is the movement of the resurrected Christ or the Holy Spirit in the life of a believer. You are not bound by the standards or values of this world. Though we are *in* the world, we are not *of* the world in terms of our value tags.

Paul shares two kinds of communities in his letter; those that keep the values of the world in terms of enforcing race, gender and status standards are likened to the community described in Galatians 5: 19–21, “The acts of sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity, idolatry and witchcraft, hatred, discord, factions, drunkenness and so on.” This society is weak and oppressive in nature. The power of circumcision and religious laws cannot keep away sexual immorality or idolatry or witchcraft etc., from the life of the Galatians. The maintenance of the Jewish nationalistic values does not keep sin at bay but rather gives opportunity for more sin to come in.

Then there is the community which has died to these values and is resurrected to the values of Christ, described in Galatians 5:22–26, “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self control.” This is the community which has learnt not to impose their racial, nationalistic, denominational, status, gender or any other value tag upon the other. The value and the worth of the other is in the death and resurrection of Christ.

Summary

According to Galatians, empowerment and liberation are like two sides of the same coin. Only when the values of the world die does the liberation begin. The process is set in motion by having faith in the Christ-event. The dying is a life-long *process* and the resurrection of Christ within us is also a life-long *progress*. As long as the faith in the Christ event is maintained the process is in motion.

Remove the faith and the movement stops. Therefore empowerment is the dying of values in terms of race, gender and status, and liberation is recognizing or discovering our worth in Christ. This dying and rising is like a sunset and sunrise; a daily event. Every day is a day of dying to some form of value system, and every day is a day of affirming that my values, and my worth and the worth of the other is in Christ and Christ alone, meaning his death and his resurrection.

Questions for Discussion Groups

1. According to your communities back at home what are the values or worth attached to:
 - a) Various races?
 - b) Ethnic groups?
 - c) Gender?
 - d) Status in church, tradition? and
 - e) Denominationalism?
2. Are they empowering you to be liberating person and communities? If the answer is no; are you willing to die to those values?
3. What would be the consequences if you did not uphold such values?

Sharing

Value system in regard to

- **Race:**

We may not be able to directly answer about race, but we would like to discuss for example, Fijians where it is the ownership of land; for Samoans it is status, and for Tongans it is a combination of both land and status.

Are you willing to die to those values? What would be the consequences?

- **Gender:**

We didn't start with gender, but I think it is true for the women – they don't feature much in decision-making. They take a back-seat role in most community and family activities. Most people in our group recognise that the women are very powerful and respected members of Pacific communities, but when it comes to decision-making, that is normally done by the male.



- **Denomination:**

Most in the group think the Pacific churches are well respected and highly regarded. Activities always start and close with prayer, and are guided by Christian values. We realise that we have differences in our denominations in the way we do theology, our costumes, our worship – we are different but we give respect for all other Christian denominations in our countries. We did talk about the denomination issue. A well known factor is the difference between the mainline churches on one side and the Pentecostal churches on the other. And there are differences within the Pentecostal churches. But in the church in Samoa we have seen some understanding between the mainline churches and welcoming our evangelicals and Pentecostals within NCC. So the differences that have been there are toning down and others are joining in so we can get together on common ground and lead worship together as a family. So I think there is some progress on our side.

- **Status:**

We discussed the status on church and tradition. Given the time constraints, we listened to the story of only one particular nation. We heard that church has a strong influence and emphasis on status, as it does in other Pacific nations. It has tremendous power with the government; because they didn't have an NCC, the government formed this church advisory council to meet and advise the government on church-related issues. The government calls on them to pray during events etc. Two empowering factors suppress status in church and tradition; one is the culture, in the sense that because we have our culture and Christian beliefs in the church, holding the two together and that suppresses a bit in the church. Second is leadership; it depends on the leadership. Liberated leaders add value to those who are under them and encourage others to come up to a stage where they can be recognized. It is only through Christ that other people can recognize the values and the importance of others and encourage them to come up to the level where they are supposed to be.

Rev Votomosi thanked the groups for the sharing. The phrasing of the questions is in order that delegates will continue to think about our relationships as the body of Christ even after we return home.

Closing personal remarks

In relation to my own personal experience, I have very strong feelings based on my experience in relation to the value system that I felt was imposed upon me, particularly in relation to sexuality and single mothers, homosexuals, lesbians, women and children, girls and boys who have been molested or raped. I have strong feelings in regards to this. I don't condone this, I firmly believe that Christ died for our sins, and I know this is a form of our brokenness. But I would like us to reflect on how we, as a church, as the body of Christ, label, put name tags on, and thus affect our relationships. As soon as we see someone swinging the hips, but who has muscles and wears earrings and lipstick, we begin to avoid them; their worth is in the swinging of the hips and their makeup. That is as far as we reach. Lesbians, those raped or molested, or a prisoner – those personal experiences, those name tags, cause us to avoid them. I would like us to reconsider the way we impose these labels and name tags that we place upon these wounded suffering people. My family is part of this suffering. I want to minister to them as far as I can to empower them to see that their value is in Christ Jesus. This is a process. I hope we will encourage that difficult journey and process within us. If we have faith in Christ that process is already in motion, and nothing is impossible.



Bible Study III

“Atua, Empower us to be Liberating Communities”

(Philemon 1 - 21)

Introduction

Talofa to you all in the Name of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. Mr. Moderator, Deputy Moderator, General Secretary and all officers of PCC, our ecumenical and partner church representatives, and all delegates and observers to this 9th PCC Assembly.

I thank God for the opportunity to be here at this Assembly as a member of the Bible Study team. I sincerely feel that His Hand and grace is shown in the decision and choice of PCC and PTC. To you Lord be honor and praise. I would be failing in the expression of gratitude if I do not thank PCC and PTC for their parts. I, therefore also would like to thank you Rev. Valamotu Palu and PCC, for the official invitation and the encouragement to be part of the team. It humbled me, but it also challenged me to accept.

Lastly, I thank our team; our leader, Rev. Rosalyn Nokise and Rev. Mereia Votomosi for recommending me to PCC as well as all the help and encouragement they gave me. The internet lines have been busy with planning in the past weeks. I must also mention Rev. Dr. Nokise, Principal of PTC for the encouragement and the confidence in me. The choice to let me do the last Bible Study, to sum up as the “*taualuga*” of our



**Galoane Sunia
Ta'ase**

Mrs. Galoane Sunia Ta'ase was one of the pioneer graduates of a Diploma in Theological Studies from the Pacific Theological College in the 1970s.

Since her return, she has made valuable contribution to women's work within the Congregational Christian Church of American Samoa.

work, is an honor and humbling experience, thank you again.

When I was introduced as the first woman graduate of PTC, I saw the look of surprise in many faces, "We never knew she attended PTC!" There was also the questioning look and someone did ask me, "if you were at PTC, where were you all these years?" I have been around; working alongside my husband in the ministry and work of God.

Thank you PTC for the opportunity. Perhaps now my church, especially my elder fathers, know that I am a PTC graduate, they will ordain this humble servant so I can be a Reverend like Roslyn and Mereial

"Le Atua e, Empower us to be Liberating Communities."

Much reflection has been done on our Assembly theme. Nevertheless, I too must reflect in order to understand the task set out for us by the theme. I concur with our team that our theme is a deep yearning, a plea and a prayer to our '*Atua*' to help equip and empower us to assist in the liberation of people under oppression. It pre-supposes, therefore, the presence of oppressive forces within the confines of our communities and churches, from which people must be liberated. Our prayer, therefore in our theme is a request, a petition to God to empower us, so that we can become liberating communities.

In reflecting, then, on the theme, I see two tasks or responsibilities for our Bible studies.

- i) To identify and understand the oppressive forces that affects our lives.
- ii) To help us become communities committed to the liberation of people under those forces of oppression.

Task 1 has been fulfilled by the papers presented during the Assembly, as well as the first two Bible Studies. For example, some of the oppressive conditions rampant in our societies include:

- Violence against women and children;



- Power and the desire to maintain power;
- Economic systems that make the rich richer, and the poor, poorer;
- Fear that comes through life-threatening diseases such as HIV and AIDS;
- Some elements in our culture, such as our value systems;
- Race and racial discrimination; and
- Threats posed by the phenomenon of globalization such as climate change, rise in sea level, soil erosion, deforestation and impact on the eco-system.

These are, but a few examples of the oppressive issues now affecting and oppressing our communities; and they have been discussed in our first two studies and in the Assembly papers, leaving the second important task pre-supposed by the theme to be dealt with, that is to answer the question, How can we be empowered to be liberating communities?

Rosalyn and Mereia have begun our response to the task.

- Rosalyn drew our attention to five women who were “empowered to choose life amidst the fear of oppression under which they lived.” From the empowerment of these women, we can learn how we too can be empowered.
- Mereia drew our attention to the fact that to Paul:
 - * God is our only source of empowerment;
 - * The God who incarnated in Christ, thereby entering our humanity so that He could save us from the oppression of sin; the work that ultimately took Him to the Cross and death. Yet the Lord who rose again and lived for evermore;
 - * The Christ event which, to Paul, became the source of empowerment, and
 - * Liberation as “dying to the world and rising again with Christ into a new life of freedom.

This morning, I will seek to add some insights from the study of our passage.

a) *The choice of text*

I have chosen for our Bible study text this morning the Letter

of Paul to Philemon, for two reasons:

- i) this year marks the 200th anniversary of (or since) the Abolition of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, following the passing of legislations in England which ended, at least on paper, the dreaded practice of selling human beings as slaves. Despite this significant event, 200 years down the road, we are still wrestling with the problem of oppression and slavery in many forms. The Letter to Philemon will speak to us about slavery and oppression pointing to steps/stages in the process of liberation.
- ii) Our Assembly Theme, “Le Atua e, Empower us to be liberating communities,” is a deep yearning, a plea and a prayer to God for empowerment not only to be liberated but also to be liberating communities. I feel that the Letter to Philemon has a lot to teach us about liberation. As such the Letter to Philemon will help us understand our theme and thereby equipping us to be liberating communities.

b) An outline of our task for this morning

I intend to do four things with you this morning.

- i) Reading of the Text. For any Bible Study, a good clear reading and understanding of the text is necessary. We will do that, with the help of the selected readers.
- ii) I will briefly outline the traditional interpretation of the text. What does the text as read, say to us and the topic of liberation? Who are the main characters and what are their depicted roles?
- iii) I will introduce an alternative interpretation from a re-reading of the same text. This will be done through a series of questions, whose answers will suggest new emphasis which will illuminate the steps/stages in the process of liberation and shed light on how we as churches can become liberating communities.
- iv) I will ask for your reflections in small groups to questions which will be provided.



The reading of the text

Four readers will read from the New Revised Standard Version as follows:

- I shall read the salutation of the Letter v.1 -3
- Miss Vaioqe Tuito'elau, from the church in Nu'uuli will read vv. 4 -7
- Mrs. Anne Hollister, a CCCAS Minister's wife from the village of Ilili will read vv.8 - 16
- Mrs. Mafu Alaelua, the wife of a Kanana Fou Lecturer shall read vv. 17-21.

The traditional meaning of the text

The story revolves around two individuals - Onesimus and Paul in Rome, with implications for a group of people which includes Philemon and those collectively called "the Church in his house."

a) Let us first look at Onesimus

He was the slave who ran away from his master - Philemon.

He went to Rome and became a friend and companion of Paul.

He was converted to the gospel by Paul. After the conversion, there were changes in his status, as evident in his change of name (or meaning of his name) from Onesimus 'the useless', to Onesimus 'the useful.'

There was a change in kinship labels which describes him, for example from the runaway slave to "my child," "my very own heart," and "my brother."

All we know about Onesimus is gleaned from what others say about him, i.e. he was a slave. Throughout the story, he was depicted as a voiceless, powerless slave; others speak and do things for him. He stood as the slave at the periphery (other side) of the story.

b) Then there was Paul

- The Apostle - in prison in Rome for his faith in Jesus Christ.
- He accepted the runaway slave and converted him to the Gospel.
- After the conversion, he recognized and accepted a new relationship with Onesimus.

- He wrote to Philemon and the “Church in his house” to welcome back Onesimus, not as a slave but as a fellow ‘brother’ in Christ.
 - He stands at the center of the story as the ‘voice’ and ‘power’ of the slaves, and the skillful negotiator attempting to influence Philemon and the Church to do what he, Paul, had done to the slave.
- c) Thirdly, there is Philemon and the “Church that meet in his house,” people being persuaded by Paul to accept the “new status”, of the liberated slave Onesimus.

That more or less sums up the traditional understanding of the epistle. What does it say about oppression and liberation?

1. The victims of oppression/slavery are depicted as voiceless, powerless people, whose rights and privileges are trodden upon and whose fate seems to rest with those whose consciences are affected by the events which lead them to act on behalf of the “voiceless and powerless.” People like the daughter of Pharaoh, Paul, William Wilberforce and many other humanitarians in history.
2. Leaders, Church leaders whose consciences were affected by
 - the power of the gospel; and
 - by close association with the slaves which moved them to work for liberation.
 Paul was a typical church leader who worked to further the process of liberation by accepting the slave, confronting him with gospel and helping to influence Philemon.
3. The Church silently accepting oppression and needing to be liberated to become a liberating community. Overall, the traditional reading does not say much about liberation and how we as churches should become liberating communities.

I would like to introduce you to an alternative reading of the text; looking at it from another perspective to give us fresh insights into the story. We will seek to put Onesimus in the centre, and Paul, Philemon and the church on the side. This practice of “re-reading the texts” or offering “alternative readings” is a ‘tool’ used more and more by biblical scholars to gain fresh insights into the Bible. Reading



from “another perspective” is a new tool in Bible study. As far as I know, it is used by many Caribbean theologians, and I would like to try it here with you.

For this re-reading, we will use a series of questions:

Question 1: Why did Onesimus run away?

Following the format used by Rosalyn on the first Bible study, please reflect with those beside you for a few minutes. Thank you, I am sure the different reflections came up with many answers to the question.

We are told nothing about this in the text. There are suggestions in what Paul wrote that Onesimus may have stolen (money or goods) from his master and ran. But he may have stolen to pay his way to Rome i.e. to help him fulfill the real motive for running away! What is that motive? Why did he run away? Burchell Taylor, a Caribbean Theologian, hit the nail squarely on the head when he wrote:

“... there is an important explanation for Onesimus’ running away that must be reckoned with. He was simply not accepting slavery as something which he must be subjected. ...His act of running away was protest action. It was an act of defiance and rebellion of the human spirit against oppression and indignity. Therefore, running away is not simply an act of cowardice... It is an act of enormous courage. ... It shows Onesimus’s distinct preference for freedom in spite of the dangers involved.”

Why did Onesimus run away? Because of the yearning of the human mind to be free. His running away was a protest action against oppression. By running away, he ‘initiated’ the process of liberation. As ‘initiator’ Onesimus’ place is at the centre of the story!

Question 2: If Onesimus was the 'initiator' of the process of Liberation, what then was Paul's role?

(Again, 3 minutes for delegates to discuss amongst themselves).

Two groups were invited to give their responses to the question.:

- 1 We said he offered an open door, an open heart to welcome somebody who is in distress. He took the responsibility to allow somebody to enjoy his freedom, a reflection of his own self. In doing that, Onesimus felt that somebody was listening to him in going through the process of finding freedom.
- 2 Paul accepted Onesimus as part of him, seeing him not as a slave, but he took him in as though he was part of him. He appealed to Timothy to accept him as a brother, and offered that if there be any charge at all, please put in on Paul's account. He wanted Onesimus to be like him, to be part of the brotherhood, to enjoy that same esteem and privilege that he had, an ordinary man accepted by everybody.
- 3 Paul was the initiator of reconciliation, especially of Philemon's church and house.
- 4 Summary, Paul opened doors, wanted Onesimus to be like him, called him "my child, my brother, my beloved one." He became the mediator, initiator that wrote to Philemon and the church.

If Onesimus was the 'initiator' of the process of Liberation, what then was Paul's role? Let me state a few facts. Let us again look at Paul. Paul was:

- A missionary, apostle, founder and planter of many churches;
- An elder statesman for the Church - accepted imprisonment for faith; and
- The guardian and bearer of the gospel.

As such, he typifies many of you sitting in this hall this morning. If Onesimus was the 'initiator' of the process of liberation what then was Paul's role? Before we answer that, please reflect with me on an example of oppression now rampant in our communities

- a) Think of a woman - who has lived for many years in an abusive violent relationship. She endured countless beatings, inhuman



treatment for one reason or another! Finally the woman decided to end the oppressions by getting up and returning to her family, her church, her people. The families, the churches, etc., instead of accommodating her, decided to return her to her abusive relationship with words like:

“Go back and mend things in your home.”

“The Bible tells us “to turn the other cheek.”

“The woman is supposed to be obedient to the husband, the head of the family.”

Behind the sending back also are reputations, a family and church names and honors to be upheld. “What would people say? Your father is the minister. How can he preach about family’s staying together if you divorce your husband?”

Paul could have done the same with Onesimus; had him returned to his master Philemon, a man of influence, rich and a great asset to the church. He would have been pleased if Paul could have quietly arranged with him to get back the slave. But Paul did not. He:

- i) Received and accepted Onesimus;
- ii) Confronted him with the gospel and witnessed a transformation in the slave;
- iii) Recognized the new change, and he himself changed his perception of Onesimus.

Paul’s actions continued, extended and deepened the process of liberation. He became the ‘facilitator’ of the process of liberation.

Mind you! Paul’s actions with regard to Onesimus come as a surprise! Before this Paul seemed to have adopted the same attitude of silent acceptance of the practice of slavery, hence oppression. In some of his letters, he counseled his converts to accept the practice:

- wives being subject to their husbands;
- slaves obeying their masters.

In the Epistle to Philemon, Paul no longer condones oppression but became the ‘facilitator’ who uses his skills to see that the process of liberation is not limited to himself but should be extended to the masters of slavery and the church. Somewhere along the line before

he met Onesimus, Paul's conscience was severely influenced and touched. As a result, he no longer stood aside silently accepting oppression, but became the force that challenged the process! Courageous church leaders like Paul are needed to lead our churches to become liberating communities!

Question 3: Why was it necessary for Onesimus to go back to Philemon and the "Church that met in his house?"

Three groups invited to share reflections:

- First, he was sent by Paul, the one who received the run-away slave, converted and transformed him to become a real Christian, and send him back to his boss, Philemon and told him "he is not the man you used to know before. He is transformed, changed, a new man. Please receive him. If you want to punish him because he ran away, reserve that punishment for me." So Paul was like Jesus Christ, he was to die on our behalf. Like Paul told Onesimus, take this to Philemon, if he wants to punish, beat, skin, burn or kill you, please write that on my account.

Secondly he went back to reconcile with Philemon. We must be thankful to Paul and Onesimus because they converted Philemon to become a Christian. That is a challenge to us.

- Second speaker: To make the reconciliation complete and to prove that reconciliation is achieved, Onesimus must go back to his master, not as a slave to a master but as a brother to a brother, and to the church that met in his house.

I'd like to share with you two observations:

- a) Paul has recognized the liberated status of Onesimus, as affirmed in the ways mentioned above. I would like to think that Paul was not content to limit this new attitude to himself; the process must be extended to Onesimus's former owner and the church in his house, hence the plan to send him back.
- b) Although Onesimus has been liberated in the eyes of Paul, he will continue to be regarded as a slave by those who knew him as a slave. Philemon and the Church and community must also accept the new status of Onesimus. Onesimus must go back in order for Philemon and the Church to be liberated from their attitudes and



recognize Onesimus as a liberated slave. The process of liberation must be completed by extending it to include Philemon and the Church in his house. They must stand in solidarity with Paul as facilitator of the Liberating Process.

Question 4: How can we as Pacific churches be empowered to be liberating communities?

Discussion in groups: the following answers were shared from the groups:

- 1 First by not trying to shut out the light that has started, for example in Onesimus's story, something came from him, maybe through the Spirit and it was important not to put that light off. Also, the church's role in encouraging, because some of us during this conference have seen some light and we are burning to go out. The problem is when we go back we tend to forget. But the churches that are represented here should act as Paul to help the light to shine. It is a sharing of what we have so that the Onesimus of our days may go back and be fully liberated; otherwise the things burning in us will just die and come back in the next five years.
- 2 We see it to be liberating community, it is only God that can empower us but the churches have to do their part in the process.
- 3 To become empowered as churches to be liberating communities, we need to identify the marginalised within and beyond us. We need the marginalised to become liberating communities.
- 4 I think that Paul is a slave – Christ's slave. Onesimus became Christ's slave. And it is important that Philemon understand that he too is a slave of Christ. In order to be empowered as Pacific churches to be liberating communities we have to live ecumenism freely, nothing dividing us. We are all sinners and we are all now Christ's slave.
- 5 I remember what coaches usually say when a team falters in a game. "Let's get back to the basics." It is all about Jesus. That is what we have been saying from the beginning. He is the liberator himself who liberates us from our shortcomings, but also from the wound up situations we are caught in. Philemon was caught

up in it, so was Onesimus until he saw the light when he came in contact with Paul. Once we have Christ we should not sit down but go forth and share, being liberating agents in our society. Be aware of the marginalised, and not just aware, but do something to bring about some hope in their lives. The church is called to do that, it is the basics.

- 6 How can a slave liberate a slave? A church must be able to reconcile itself with God before being empowered to liberate the communities, and people in the communities.

Conclusion

As our Bible study team has put me last, it falls on me to say something to bring our studies to a conclusion. *Le Atua e*, Empower Us to be liberating Communities!

How have our studies helped us in our quest for empowerment to be liberating communities? I believe God can speak to us through his empowering Word and He has done that through the studies offered. Let me isolate some important issues that emerged from the study that will help us in our quest to become liberating communities?

1. There is a need for all of us to accept the fact that oppression and slavery in many forms are rampant in our societies. Many of us live in denial of the fact that there is oppression around us. We silently condone oppression. We must also recognize and accept that we too may be part of the oppressing forces/power. We must be ready to receive and accept those under oppression.
2. We must be aware of the need of the oppressed to be liberated and accept their initiative to be liberated. Because they are voiceless and powerless, we may be tempted to impose our own prejudiced judgments on them. We must recognize that beyond the oppression, they are human beings with the intrinsic human desire to be free. Remember, running away is an act of courage, a protest to oppression like Onesimus or initiating their liberation as Jochabed and her daughter Miriam in the Old Testament.
3. We need to be courageous leaders like Paul, who will not allow accepted practices to silence us to the need to work for liberation. We must be ready to allow our consciences to be influenced and



follow the dictates of those consciences.. We must try to be facilitators; to continue, extend and deepen the process of liberation.

4. As churches and leaders we must stand in solidarity with the oppressed.
5. We must recognize that there is no liberation without the power of God. As Mereia pointed out yesterday, God is our only source of empowerment. The power of the gospel, which works through people. The power that should first liberate us and allow us to be instruments of liberation.
 - What made the midwives defy the commands of the King to kill?
 - What went into the mind of Pharaoh's daughter as she looked down upon the lovely Hebrew baby boy in the ark on the river?
 - What changed Paul's perception of slavery in particular, and oppression in general?

It is the power of God, the power of the gospel that transformed all these people and enabled them to become initiators of liberation who stood courageously to initiate and extend the process. We as churches, as leaders, as trustees, and heralds of the gospel, must harness that power to liberate us and empower us to be liberating communities.

As Bible Study leaders, we hope and pray that the insights you may have gained from these studies will enlighten and move you further to be God's agents of liberation.

May God Bless PCC and PTC, and may he make his face to shine on this Conference, and may his peace be in all our churches.

We acknowledge with thanks the Secretariat of the Pacific Council of Churches whose approval we had sought and received to print the above papers presented at the 2007 PCC General Assembly by

- Fr. Dr. Mika Paunga's article and poem (Pages 25 - 57);
- Rev. Rosalyn Nokise (Pages 58 - 76);
- Rev. Mereia Votomosi (Pages 77 - 88); and
- Mrs. Galoane Sunia Ta'ase (pages 89 - 101)

Information for Contributors

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- ◆ helpful material for pastors and church workers (liturgical, pastoral, educational)
- ◆ artistic expressions of the Christian faith (poetry, visual art, music)
- ◆ notes and reviews of books that are relevant for Pacific Christians
- ◆ information about ongoing research in the theological disciplines in the Pacific.



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Ernst, Manfred, 1994,
*Winds of Change: rapidly
growing religious groups in the
Pacific Islands*, Pacific
Conference of Churches, Suva.

Little, Jeanette, 1996, ' .
. and wife: Mary Kaaialii
Kahelamauna Nawaa,
missionary wife and
missionary', in *The Covenant
Makers: Islander missionaries
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Theological College & Institute
of Pacific Studies at the
University of the South Pacific,
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